BK08738938

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/nachette0000unse

NACHETTE

NACHETTE

NACHETTE

BY
NED NYE
AND
ROBT. A. WASON

ILLUSTRATED BY
ANDRE DE TAKACS

JEROME H. REMICK & COMPANY
NEW YORK DETROIT

Copyright 1909
Jerome H. Remick & Co.

Published by
Jerome H. Remick Printing Co.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
I.	Professor's Discovery	1
II.	The Acquaintance of Prince Alexander	9
III.	Jack Braxton Calls on Nachett	19
IV.	Planning for a Tour	31
V.	At the Park	40
VI.	The Countess	54
VII.	Nachette Appears in Rome	62
VIII.	The Assembly in Royal Court	74
IX.	Disappearance of Nachette	90
X.	The Search	102
XI.	Bertrand and His Assistants	112
XII.	Still Hunting	122
XIII.	The Mistake	136
XIV.	Perucho's Daughter	146
XV.	In the Tour	160
XVI.	The Prince at the Tour	167
XVII.	The Escape	177
XVIII.	Starts for Paris	192
XIX.	The Struggle	210
XX.	Professor Hears Good News	220
XXI.	A New Lodging House	234
XXII.	Letter to Clarice	249
XXIII.	Professor's Body Taken to Paris	261
XXIV.	The Arrest	271
XXV.	The Quarrel	282
XXVI.	Jack and His Friend	292
XXVII.	The Accident	300
XXVIII.	Back to Paris	308
XXIX.	At the Funeral	319
XXX.	The Rehearsal	328
XXXI.	The Play	338
XXXII.	The Engagement	353
XXXIII.	On Their Way to New York	363
XXXIV.	In New York	373
XXXV.	Nachette and Jack	381
XXXVI.	The Understanding	390
XXXVII.	Flossie's Advice	398
XXXVIII.	The Wedding Day	408
XXXIX.	The Ring	429
XL.	The Re-union	439

NACHETTE

CHAPTER I

PARIS was expectant, Paris was also amused. The Herr Professor Brahmfelder was to have a benefit, which, considering his financial straits, was most appropriate, and the very cream of the musical world had hastened—yes, hastened, to volunteer its services. The Herr Professor was a pathetic little man who had the misfortune to possess a grand soul in a comic body. His gestures, his expressions, his very clothes would have been dignified and impressive had he been of commanding presence; alas! he was short and lean, near-sighted and thin-voiced; and yet, in his time, the Herr Professor had found many a diamond in the dust-heap. Of late years, business methods of a new and strenuous type had crowded him to the wall, and there was much of real charity in the kindly efforts to make his benefit a success.

But, as was perfectly natural, the Professor had dragged in some of his usual, but unintentional, broad comedy. He had burst chortling into the office of the Opéra Comique with the announcement that he had discovered the one artist of the century. "Ach! it was gifen to my old age to find the prize which surpasses all the other great arteests which I haf added to the list of the immor-

tals. She has come direct from the gods, and I—I haf found her!"

"Where is she stopping during her visit to earth?" asked Finchon, the tenor, with mock gravity.

"At the graduation exercises of the conservatory did I find her—yes," answered the little Professor with a gesture stolen direct from vaudeville. And then the office shook with laughter.

And thus you see why Paris was expectant; and thus you see why Paris was amused. Finchon, La Cambrairio, Molianna, and all the other brilliant stars were on the bill to arouse expectancy; but at their head came the name of Nachette, the unknown, and therefore Paris, familiar with the little Professor's peculiarities, was amused. But, after all, the regents were happy. It had been a difficult and a delicate matter to select which name in such a galaxy of illustrious ones should head the bill, and as all could see the humor of this untried girl taking the place, a stretch of extremely thin ice was passed with merry laughter.

Every seat to the very roof was filled, and throngs stood in eager anticipation behind the luckier ones whose foresight had procured comfort. From the first sweep of the overture it was a success. Number succeeded number, and after each the house rocked with applause; the artists caught inspiration from their reception and gave their very best. The bill was so long that no encores were permitted; but flowers were showered upon the stage and the air was filled with "bravos." The artists knew that they were performing neither for money nor to money, and the thought thrilled them. Never before had such a critical audience been gathered

together; never before had those upon the stage made such supreme efforts to bring out each point to its true value. The mere conception of such a magnetic union of auditorium with stage is enough to warm the heart of any true lover of music.

Twice was the Herr Professor called upon for a speech, and twice did he mingle his tears with his appreciation in a way that was irresistibly droll in spite of a certain tender tightness it gave the chords of the heart. Both times he had finished by leaning forward and saying in a deep, confidential voice, as though he were pleading with them to hold some of their enthusiasm in reserve, "Ach, but wait—wait until you have heard Nachette!"

And the moment had arrived when Nachette was to appear. The flesh is very material, and while the soul had been feasting, the unsympathetic body had become wearied of its cramped position. The audience knew that the treat was over, and the usual bustle of a great concourse preparing to depart filled the house as she came upon the stage. The Herr Professor led her forth and held up his hand for silence: "This is she—this is Nachette."

A hush fell upon the audience as it looked up at the girl. She was very young, her face was pale, brows broad and sweeping, with a curious arch in the center of each. The lips were full and the mouth rather large; the lower face was rounded and the dark hair was parted in the center and fell on either side in two waves. There was a certain atmosphere of foreignness, which was noticeable even in that cosmopolitan gathering, and yet there was no clue to her nationality. She was above medium height, slender, and simply dressed.

Several started to leave as she drew her bow

across the strings in the opening chords of "Mignon," but there was a fulness in her tones which drew them once more to their seats. She handled her bow with a grace which seemed natural rather than acquired. The audience sat in critical silence. Could it be that the old Professor had discovered a new Olympian? Suddenly the violin gave a horrid groan—to call it a mere discord were a misnomer. A ripple of laughter swept over the house—the expected had happened. They saw, but did not seem to feel, the distress upon the face of the girl, who stood with head bowed, the violin loosely clasped in her arms. The Professor rushed upon the stage and shook her roughly by the shoulders: "Why, why did you do it? You haf disgraced the great violin to play on which I haf lended you! Oh, why did you do it?"

For a moment she did not answer. "I—I do not know. I was not frightened. I did not see the people—I played only to you, until the man in the orchestra began waving the horn back and forth—I don't know—it worried me, and then, suddenly I remembered where I was, and I—I went all to pieces."

"Ah, you haf not the courage—you haf broken my heart—give to me the violin, and go—go away, and—and wash dishes."

He reached for the violin; she clutched it to her breast with one arm while she rudely thrust him back with the other. "No, no! You shall not have it. The violin he is my lover—he will tell them—he will apologize—he knows how it was, and he will make them know. Go—leave the stage—leave the stage."

Her voice was low, but so perfectly toned that it

carried to the highest tier. She walked imperiously to the front of the stage and bade the orchestra be silent. Then she faced the audience. A bright red spot burned on each cheek, which heightened the fire darting from her eyes; her brows were drawn together, and as she faced them she seemed like some barbaric princess about to issue an edict.

The scene between the Professor and his disappointing discovery had been extremely comical—the audience was carried away with it; and in spite of their culture they very closely resembled the audience at a cheap vaudeville house upon amateur night. They offered bogus congratulations and insincere advice, but mostly they laughed, and nothing can cut a sensitive and untried nature with so painful a sting as can the laughter of ridicule. It would have tested the armor of a street-singer to face an assemblage like this; but as the young girl did face it, her lips set still more firmly, until at last she raised her hand with an imperious gesture and in a voice clear and firm as the note of a çello she cried, "Silence!" The hand still remained in command and the eyes faced them without flinching. Then, as her personality impressed them, their curiosity impelled them to listen, and as soon as she could be heard she bowed in pretty apology and said with perfect simplicity: "Listen—my lover, he will tell you why."

A strange, soft strain came from the violin. It ran on lightly, with no great depth but with a certain restful peace. "You see"—her voice accorded perfectly with the rhythm of her instrument—"I am at the conservatory." Then came a succession of rapid, fluttering notes, which seemed to crowd

one another. "The day of graduation is drawing near." The notes came brokenly, but finally swept into a grand symphony, strong and full and determined. "I am to give 'Mignon'—the Herr Professor is there—I am at first nervous—then I am resolved to do my best—behold, I even try 'Mignon.'" With wonderful ease and grace she swept into the masterpiece, played the first aria with faultless skill and with a passion which was new even to such listeners as those who sat spellbound before her.

As she tapered off into a hesitating modulation, the house rose in a storm of applause, but she only stood shaking her head and frowning, while the bow upon the G string jerked out, "No, no, no!" Again they were silent, while the instrument resumed the hesitating intonation: "See, I know that I have played it, but I am embarrassed at the praise I receive." Again they broke into applause, again she hushed them to silence, while the violin broke into a dance measure, light, airy, and rollicking, like elfin music at a moonlight frolic. "Ah, I can scarce contain my joy! I am to play before those who can tell." Then came a slow, diffident measure, which increased in nervousness until it opened into "Mignon" once more; she played it to the bar upon which the former discord had occurred, and again like a blow came the harsh repetition, but this time there was no pause. A perfect storm of fury seemed to possess the violin, it raved, it cursed, it shrieked; the form of the girl swayed to and fro in her passion, the bow darting back and forth across the strings like the angry striking of a serpent; the listeners leaned forward in their seats, an expression of pain upon every

face—and then the violin broke into sobs. "See—my lover is enraged—he strikes me—he beats me with his hand; and then, he is sorry—he is broken-hearted; but now I shall try the 'Fossilando,' and if I play it he will be my lover once again."

She once more stepped to the front of the stage, picked out the instruments she wanted to accompany her, and played it,—ah, she played it as it had never before been played. Perhaps her technique had been equaled, possibly surpassed; but the expression, the depth of emotion, the subtle soul which is a gift from on high, and above the reach of a dozen lifetimes spent in ceaseless drill—these reached out and caught the audience as in a mesh, and they sat in dumb amazement, while the girl upon the stage seemed a magician who compelled wondrous melody from a captive spirit chained within the hollow of her violin.

She paused amidst perfect silence, made a slight bow, and was about to retire when from a box upon the right, Prince Alexander, the wealthy Russian, leaned forward and cast a diamond ring upon the stage. It seemed a signal. Diamonds, gold, watches, jewelry of all descriptions were sent up amid bravos, clapping of hands, and a clamorous demand for encores. The little Professor rushed from the wings, covered her hands with kisses, led her to the footlights, and said: "Behold—what I told you; it was not efen a hint! This woman, this girl, this child—she it is who has the gift divine which shall nefer be equaled. And you laughed at me! But you do not laugh now. You will nefer again laugh at the old Professor, because he is to be the manager of Nachette, and Nachette is to reign Queen of Melody. Listen, this violin is the

violin of Paganini—I haf gifen it to her, for no one else is worthy to touch it with a glove."

Slowly the excitement died away, the notes of congratulation ceased, and the great theater emptied. Nachette and her dark-faced maid sat in the tiny dressing-room which had been assigned them, while the Professor mounted guard outside to see that no one intruded. There was a settled sadness upon the somber face of the servant which even the radiant smiles that wreathed the features of her young charge failed to lift. There was a strength in the countenance of the older woman which spoke of a long-continued struggle with the world and with herself. When her glance rested upon the girl it was lit by infinite tenderness, at all other times it was a trifle grim; and to-night her intuition told her that her charge was standing at the entrance of a path which led into a deep and tangled forest. As she viewed the heap of jewelry an angry frown came to her eyes; but there was no way to return it, and of a truth its monetary value was almost a necessity.

She opened the notes which had been sent to Nachette. Most of them she tore in two, and the fierce glare in her eyes showed that it would be extremely unpleasant for the one who approached with an unworthy motive. They finally left the theater, hurriedly entered a landau, and drove to the Vendome. All the way the Professor babbled about the wonders which awaited them, and Nachette made reply with the light gaiety of a child; but the woman sat brooding in the corner; so that all the contrasts of life were gathered within the narrow limits of a closed carriage, while without, Paris talked of the one who had just arrived.

The Professor rushed upon the stage.

(Page 4)

CHAPTER II

PRINCE ALEXANDER of Russia was a man of mystery. He had immense wealth, spent it lavishly, and generally with good taste. He was seldom impulsive. That is why his throwing the diamond upon the stage of the Opéra Comique had aroused such a furor. Much of his time was spent in Paris, although he was equally at home in London, Vienna, and Rome. The one metropolis which knew him not was St. Petersburg. It was perfectly well known that his absence from Russia was at the request of the Czar, but whether on account of a political intrigue or because of his entanglement with the Countess Nina, no one was sure, and Prince Alexander was a man whose secrets were his own.

He was tall, slender, and handsome in a cold, marble way, the fires of his nature being hidden at all times beneath a crust of snow. His eyes were his most distinctive feature. They were a colorless gray, devoid of any mastering light, yet few men could face them peering impassively from beneath their heavy brows.

He was a man who aroused the love of women and the admiration of men, yet in the richest sense of a grand word he had few "friends." Both men and women kept their finest and highest ideals concealed in his presence. Still there was a peculiar

fascination in his blasé nonchalance, which aroused the envy of all the young men of fashion. It was rumored that beautiful women had wept for him, and this seemed attractive to the inexperienced; it was known that he was a fine shot and splendid swordsman, that his taste was never at fault, and that his knowledge of the underworld was well-nigh limitless. All these accomplishments, carried beneath a quiet and dignified manner, made him welcome to every circle.

He lived at the Eifle Club on the Champs Elysées, and young Jack Braxton, who also lived there, was one of his most devoted worshipers. The morning after Nachette had made her wonderful début they sat at breakfast, the younger man watching each movement of the elder and copying it with flattering accuracy. There was probably not more than ten years' difference in their ages, but there were cycles between them in all other respects. Braxton was an American and a man of fair income; he was twenty-six but appeared to be much younger.

They finished their meal and leaned back for cigarettes. "She was a marvelous creature," said Braxton, apropos of nothing.

"True. What would have happened if she had not eaten the apple?" answered Alexander gravely.

"If she had not eaten the apple? Oh, I see. I was speaking of the young violinist, of course."

"I inferred that you were, but I have found in a more or less observant career that when there is the least doubt as to the identity of a lady it is always safest to conclude that our original mother was meant."

"Do you not think she was wonderful?"

"Very. And I have often speculated as to

whether she was swifter of foot and more powerful than Adam, or whether even then——"

"Oh, cut it out! You know considerable about music, as about everything else—tell me, is Nachette truly a master, or were we simply hypnotized by the weird beauty of her face, and the half-savage grace with which she swayed the entire audience in unison with her body?"

Alexander was silent for a moment. "She is a master; I have heard them all, I have heard them all."

"And do you not also think her beautiful?"

"It was not her beauty which attracted me; it was the message she gave to me through her violin. I would know in what age and in what clime her soul learned the ecstasy and the anguish of love. I must see and know her before I can form an opinion."

A shadow crossed the face of Braxton. He had slept but little the night before, because his imagination had insisted upon conjecturing possibilities wherein he would happen to be thrown into the company of this remarkable young creature who had so stirred him; and here his companion had calmly stated that he intended to become acquainted with her as though it were a foregone conclusion. He knew that the Prince did not believe in accidents; that he did believe in taking advantage of opportunities—and in creating those opportunities himself. For a moment he hated the Prince, but soon his usual smile returned, and after a little idle talk they separated—Braxton to read the papers in the hope of finding an announcement of her next appearance; the Prince in order to find her stopping-place. Neither was successful.

Professor Brahmfelder was shrewd and did not intend to surfeit the appetite of the lovers of music; so there were to be no more public appearances until the fame of his protégé was firmly established through select sources. He perfectly understood musical Paris and quietly let it be known in the right place that Nachette was open to semi-weekly engagements for private concerts at twenty-five hundred francs an evening. It was at one of these entertainments that Jack Braxton heard her and seemed an outcast at the gates of paradise; and it was at this same musicale that Prince Alexander made her acquaintance in spite of the frowns of the watchful Clarice.

Professor Brahmfelder desired Nachette to go to the leading tailor and get an entire outfit in keeping with the class in which she was about to move; but Clarice, who had been with the child since her birth, in the dwindling capacity of nurse, governess, and maid, still exercised an almost autocratic sway which was good-humoredly acknowledged by the girl, and she insisted that Nachette should wear a simple white dress, that she should attend entirely in the rôle of a musician, and should not allow herself to become a guest. Still the Prince was able to circumvent this arrangement by strategic flattery of the Professor's gift of discernment. Then he had led the Professor into a conversation concerning the possibilities of a European trip if properly conducted. "First she must play before the thrones." This was the bait which covered the hook that caught the Professor, for he well knew the influence of the Prince and the advantage of his suggestion.

From this start Prince Alexander became one of

the very few who were admitted into the friendship of the strange girl who had seemed to flutter down from another sphere and who remained an alien in spite of the warm welcome which had been given her. And the Prince was clever enough to win the trust of Clarice, who was ambitious for the artistic success of the one whom she had safely brought to the gates of womanhood.

But the simple, girlish nature of Nachette, fresh as from a convent, did not confine its dreams to musical victories alone. This Prince, with his ease of manners, his vast knowledge, and his handsome face, was a veritable Prince Charming to her. She grew to watch for his coming, to seek to please him, to play only to him when he was in her audience; and the passion and tenderness of her nature reached out and twined about his as naturally as the delicate shoots of the vine embrace the rugged oak: yet she did not love him. Ever and anon some supercilious remark would drop from his lips and so wound her that for a space he would be dethroned.

For over a month her semi-weekly private concerts were the feature of the inner circle. By this time her fame had spread through the musical channels of Europe, and Professor Brahmfelder was besieged with offers of all descriptions. The Prince, however, had now changed his view-point and advised that she wait for at least a year before making a tour. He argued that she was rapidly adding to her powers of improvisation, that her confidence before new audiences was becoming firmly fixed, and that it would be well for her to continue to live her secluded life for a time, as it would be impossible for her to avoid entering into the social world when at last she played before the

courts. As this view coincided with that of Clarice, it was natural for her to side with the Prince, whom she was beginning to trust more and more.

But while he always spoke of her to Clarice as though she were a mere child, he was growing more lover-like to Nachette herself, and each day it was becoming more welcome. At the end of the second month, as they were sitting one evening alone by a window which stood open to let in the moonlight, he asked her if she loved him.

Thousands of times before he had asked her the same question in her dreams, and she had always answered, "Yes," but now it seemed different. We may laugh at the over-use of the old, time-worn expression; at the same time it always is sudden. When the deep, tender question arises from a man's heart, like the overflowing of water from the dam which has been built to hold it, there is always a startling shock which causes the true woman's heart to pause for an instant and then to beat rapidly as though it would run away and hide.

She sat silent and looked at her hands, which were clasped in her lap, while the question repeated itself over and over in her mind. Did she love him? Love—it was a wonderful word; it meant so much, and it suggested so much more than she knew about it. Sometimes when she was playing to him she felt indeed that she comprehended the fulness of love and she poured it freely forth. But it seemed as if he were but an embodiment of all the lovers who had ever been and that she sacrificed to them all. He reached forward and took her hand. It was cold, but at his touch living fire seemed to shoot up her arm and thrill her to a newer and richer life.

Surely this was love—this strange, tingling thrill which caused her body to vibrate at his touch as the strings of her violin answered the caress of her bow. Yes, this was love—she felt that her life had no value whatever except to be poured out in offering to him. Her hand clasped his convulsively, she half stooped to kiss it; the emotions which arose in her breast came in surges like the surf beating upon a rock-bound coast and she herself seemed like a spent swimmer in their midst. And then she raised her eyes to his.

The moonlight fell full upon his face—it was flushed, the eyes seemed like coals of fire; the entire expression suggested the joy, the triumph, and the selfish lust of the tiger that has made his kill.

A tremor shook the slender form of the girl. She cast his hand from her, rose to her feet, and with clenched hands held tightly against her face, she looked at him a moment in horror, and then fled from the room.

Prince Alexander still sat by the open window, a contented smile upon his lips, the light of victory in his eyes. He lit a cigarette and looked down upon the tiny garden below. The strains of an old Spanish love-song floated up from an orchestra hidden in the shrubbery. The Prince hummed the tune softly to himself while he twisted the waxed ends of his mustache tighter and turned them up to a still sharper angle. "Ah, how beautifully she fights, and with what a passion will she love! She is proud—the little fairy—she hates to surrender, and the thing which maddens her most is the knowledge that she cannot resist me. I do not remember when a woman has so attracted me. By

George! if I were free, I half believe I'd marry her."

As he sat leaning out of the window and gazing idly into the garden below, a man came out of the hotel and sat upon a bench. From time to time he glanced up at the window where Alexander was sitting. The Prince watched him dreamily for a while and then struck his palm with his fist. "By Jove! It's Jack Braxton! Now it's just like the stupidity of that boy to develop *la grande passion* for Nachette. I shall have her change her address. Fool! She has never even spoken to him, and there he sits like a love-lorn poet in the moonlight, casting sheep's-eyes at her window."

At this moment he heard a low sobbing. At first he could not locate it. But as the eerie, heart-broken sadness smote his heart, he sprang to his feet and started to go in the direction which Nachette had taken. Just as his hand touched the door the sobbing changed to hysterical laughter, and the Prince started back with a shamefaced smile upon his lips. "Clever little thing! That violin is as much a part of her as her own voice."

He crossed to the window and took his seat in the shadow, while the violin continued to moan forth its passion. Finally it quieted, and after a simple interlude it swung full and joyous into a love medley. The sweet bits of dozens of old love-songs were caught up and woven into a garland of tenderness. The music came from an open window perhaps thirty feet from the one at which the Prince was sitting, and he leaned back in his comfortable chair and smiled indulgently. "The child has tact as well as musical genius. She fears that I may resent her earlier treatment, and is taking

this method of seeking forgiveness. Well, I shall set her heart at rest."

He leaned out to call her, but drew back with a curse. Jack Braxton, full in the white moonlight, was staring up at the window with a tense, trance-like expression upon his face, his hands hung at his side palms out, and his very soul seemed to be drinking in the music.

"It seems that, after all, my reputation is but a slight thing," muttered Alexander between set teeth. "This boy fancies he may seek to win that which I have chosen to be my own. Well, I wish him no harm, but if he troubles me I shall be forced to dispense with his presence."

The music played on and on; it floated out into the silvery night, merged with it, and became part of it. It filled the soul of the boy in the garden below with honest love, unselfish hope, and knightly ambition. It played on and on with changing light and varying shade, and filled the heart of the man beside the window with burning lust, selfish hate, and unscrupulous purpose. It played on and on, and as it played, the worried heart of a young maid was soothed, comforted, and strengthened; but the music so laden with human love was not a message to any man's heart—it was simply the natural yearning of inborn desire for its ideal.

The violin sang softly and more softly, the burning note of sex fell away from it, and in its place came the cradle-songs of many lands, the drowsy twittering of day-birds seeking their rest, the strange night-calls of cricket and frog and owl, and as the music fell lower and lower it finally died away before it was missed amid the customary night sounds of which it had become a part.

Alexander had intended to surprise and ridicule Braxton; but the closing notes had seemed to take away his hate, and he left the hotel quietly and drove straight to his club, where he transgressed his former clean record by retiring without taking a glance at the morning paper.

That night, as Clarice brushed her hair and put her to bed with some grumbling and much petting, Nachette asked with frank innocence: "Clarice, how can a woman tell when she is truly in love?"

A sharp spasm of pain passed across the face of the servant as she stooped to pick up some lint from the floor. "When she loses her own identity, when the laws of God and the laws of man seem but as tracings upon the sand, when she is willing to give up time and eternity if it will bring pleasure to the man—then is a woman in love."

"Well," said Nachette, drowsily, "I don't ever expect to be in love."

"You? Why, of course you'll never be in love! You have a whole world of your own within that violin. Don't you get to studyin' about love, honey—not for a good many years yet."

The face of Nachette upon the snowy pillows was very pure and very beautiful, and as Clarice closed the door she paused and shook her head slowly, while a fierce expression sprang to her eyes.

Braxton sat on the bench in the garden until the cold, damp wind of early morning aroused him and sent him shivering back to his apartment.

CHAPTER III

THE question of maturity is not one of years, but of occasions. Jack Braxton had clung to his youth long past the allotted time, not because either his mind or his body was undeveloped, but because his easy circumstances and smooth-flowing existence had never brought the sterner side of his nature to the surface; but his manhood had finally broken its chrysalis during the moonlight night when he sat in the garden and listened to the ravishing music of Nachette.

He knew, as did Paris, that Prince Alexander had the entrée to her apartment, which was denied all others. He knew, as did Paris, that there was always an ulterior motive in the Prince's every action, and that there were no failures recorded against him; but from that night Braxton decided to break his lance against that of this seasoned man of the world.

He realized his own weakness with maddening certainty, but it only served to stimulate his determination. There was good red blood in the veins of Jack Braxton, and in spite of his lack of experience he was a rival to reckon with. Before, he had lain awake at night thrilling at the situations which his imagination had pictured. Always, when the theater or hotel had burst into flames, he alone had kept his head, and had saved the life of Nachette;

when the frightened team had dashed down the Boulevard, he it was who had sprung to the heads of the horses and had stopped them just upon the brink of certain tragedy. And so on through the list of romantic possibilities he followed the charming path of his fervid fancy; while Prince Alexander, cold and calculating, had simply stepped in and installed himself almost as a member of the household and also as an insurmountable barrier at the outer gate. But now Braxton abandoned his dreams, which did not seem to materialize, and determined to have speech with Nachette, cost what it might.

He was comparatively an unknown quantity, without the slightest influence with Professor Brahmfelder, and it had become so universally known that Nachette did not wish to mingle socially with the guests of the houses at which she played, that provision for her privacy was always made; and Clarice, who had succumbed to the wiles of the Prince, still looked wrathfully at all young men who ventured to smile upon her charge. It was a difficult problem, and Braxton grew moody and morose in striving to solve it.

And then, as is often the case, after he had abandoned them one of his dreams came true. He had fallen into the habit of following her home in a hansom whether he had been at the musicale or not, and one night when the Prince had not been in attendance, as she alighted at the side entrance of her quiet hotel she was recognized by a group of young fellows under the influence of wine and ripe for any amusement. Professor Brahmfelder was absolutely useless, and even Clarice was inadequate to the occasion. Ah, the joy which was in the heart of Jack

Braxton! He had not been a man long enough to lose his knight-errantry, and truly the occasion demanded prompt action. There were six in the group, and they demanded a kiss apiece.

As was customary, Jack had dismissed his cab around the corner and was walking carelessly by as though sauntering homeward. There were few people in the street, and the light from the glazed lamps at the door threw but a dim gleam. There was probably no harm in the hearts of the young fellows, but their pranks were most unwelcome. Two had seized the Professor, two Clarice, and two Nachette, and were forcing them to dance along the sidewalk.

Jack was neither tall nor broad, but he was athletic and in good training. In a flash his plan had materialized. He walked quietly up to the group, promptly knocked down the two who were holding Nachette and hurried her into the doorway of the hotel.

"Oh, will you please help my maid and the Professor?"

"Yes, presently," answered Jack, who could scarce breathe, so elated was he at his success; "but they will do them no harm, and first I wish to say that I have wanted to speak to you ever since the night of your first concert. Will you not let me call on you? I want to be your friend."

"That is kind, and I am most grateful to you for what you have just done, but help my maid and the Professor. They do not wish me to have friends."

"But you have some," said Jack, determined to profit by his opportunity, "the Prince, for instance."

"He was an old friend of the Professor's and is

needful to my artistic advancement. Won't you please rescue my maid?"

"I'll try—if you will invite me to call on you tomorrow evening."

"Then I invite you. Will you call on me tomorrow evening? But it would have been more gallant had you denied yourself the pleasure of making a bargain."

"That will be a good subject to discuss when we meet. Perhaps it would be well if you summoned a porter or two — I wish to be most presentable tomorrow night."

Just as Jack opened the door, a gendarme rounded the corner and the young frolickers hurried away. Both Clarice and the Professor were highly incensed in their own respective ways, but as Clarice's love for Nachette always triumphed over any personal grievance, she acquiesced, albeit somewhat grudgingly, in the invitation to Mr. Braxton to call on the following evening.

The next day Jack discovered that the reason the Prince was not in the party the preceding night was because he had taken a flying trip to London, to be gone several days, and this fact in no degree detracted from the pleasure which was his in anticipation. It was a terrible task that night to get his tie to suit him, but at last it was accomplished, and he set forth as trim and wholesome a young fellow as all Paris could show.

His heart was trembling with excitement as he knocked on the door of her apartment, but Nachette was in a frank mood of girlish gaiety and there was no trace of shyness about her welcome. Clarice sat in a back room at work upon some embroidery. The door between the two rooms was

open and frequent movements on her part prevented Jack from forgetting that he was under surveillance. Nachette, however, was perfectly at ease and greatly rejoiced in an opportunity to converse with one who knew the big outer world but who did not make her feel as though he were in some way her master or guardian.

Jack very much wished to bring the conversation to a more personal basis, but he was so charmed by the naïveté of this girl, so unfamiliar with Vanity Fair, its whims and its fancies, its loves and its hates, its sacrifices and its jealousies, that he soon yielded entirely to the joy of the moment. She scarcely seemed to realize that the world was at her feet, and her questions might have emanated from a simple country girl on her first visit to a city.

"Why don't you ask me to play for you?" she finally said with a quaint pout.

"I should as soon dare to ask for a beautiful diamond."

"Ah, thank you; but in my mine the more diamonds which are taken away the faster they increase."

"You know perfectly well I am human, and that alone makes me crave the wondrous music of your violin."

"That is much better. It seems strange you should not know that a woman wishes to be urged to do every single thing—even the things she most wants to do."

"And it seems still more strange that you should know this."

"Oh, I know very many things which were never taught me either by experience or by human instruction. From my music I sometimes catch the

strangest secrets. Often I cannot tell exactly what they mean, but at times my heart bleeds at the sadness of life and at times it dances at the joy of death. When I improvise I am no longer alive. I become as much an instrument as is my violin, and I tell things which I cannot know. Some of the things I remember, and this is one of them."

"Then I ask you—I beg of you—with my whole heart I beseech you to play."

A deeper tone than he had intended crept into his voice, and as she tuned her instrument Nachette looked thoughtfully into his eyes. She put the violin to her cheek and played a succession of random notes which seemed to have neither relation nor purpose—like the vague questioning of a wakeful child who takes this method of postponing the undesired bed. They continued to gaze unconsciously into each other's eyes; finally she said: "Do you know that every human soul exhales a perfume just like a flower, or like a poisonous weed? And this is the fragrance which your soul breathes out to-night."

A smile lighted his face as she commenced to play. At first there seemed to be little more of purpose than there had been in her prelude. The music flowed smoothly along with little variation in the interval between the tones. There were occasional trills like merry laughter, occasional moments of gentle tenderness, but there was nothing emotional, nothing grand. Suddenly, a passage of rich passion was followed by a deep, slow measure like a march played in simple movement upon a pipe organ, and then came a wild, tumultuous outburst of anguish which sobbed and moaned but at the same time held an undertone of strength. The melody

He . . . . promptly knocked down the two who were holding Nachette.

(Page 21)

rose and fell until they were both leaning forward upon their chairs with eyes burning into eyes. Fiercer and stronger grew the strain, like a trumpet sounding the charge amid the rattle of musketry, till with a harsh discord the girl stopped, laid the violin and the bow upon the table beside her and sat with head bowed and hands pressed against her brow. "Oh, I cannot play more, I cannot play more! It seems as though we were lost—you and I—in the midst of a terrible desert, and demons and ghouls were after us striving to destroy us utterly."

Jack was white and weak, but, true to his nationality, he felt compelled to relieve the situation by facetiousness. "By Jove, I'm rejoiced to learn that my soul has so delectable a perfume! Come—following your previous instruction that a woman wishes to be urged—play me the fragrance of the soul of his highness, the Prince Alexander. He is debonair and gay and should furnish a pleasing contrast."

The girl still sat crouched forward in her chair. "Do you know," she said confidingly, as though to an old friend, "I have never cared to play it even to myself. He has been most kind and obliging to me, but—I can't tell why—each time I have let my music twine itself about his soul, I have felt fear—the fear of the bird in the presence of the serpent, and yet he has always been kind."

"You are the most remarkable woman I have ever known."

"Why do you limit it to women—after I have told you how vain I am?"

"Because women are always more remarkable than men."

"You generally get out of your scrapes, but why do you not avoid them altogether? But we shall now have some light refreshments. Are you not hungry?"

Jack was not, but he smilingly said that he was. He was more than ever interested in this wild creature, who flitted from the lightness of girlhood to the weirdness of an ancient seeress and back to girlishness once more, as lightly as a butterfly might flit from flower to flower across a quaking morass.

She arose, walked gracefully out of the room, spoke a few words to Clarice, and then came back with a smile upon her face. There was something so comprehensive and at the same time so confiding about her smile that it invariably aroused the desire to know what droll whimsicality was behind it.

"What in the world are you smiling about?"

"Well, I just happened to think of the way we met and what a short time ago it was, and how well we get along together, and of the funny expression on your face when I played for you."

"But—was what you played simply a trick? Have you played that before?"

Jack's tone was serious, and her face instantly became grave. "Ah no, I am a slave to my music, it is no slave of mine. What it tells, it must stand responsible for—even I cannot interpret it. But now, as my penance, I shall play you what you will—that is, any written melody, but no more of the fragrance of souls."

Jack sat with his eyes upon the carpet for a space, while a soft, tender expression grew upon his face. "Then play 'My Old Kentucky Home,'" he said simply.

She played it through, low and plaintive, without a flourish or variation; then she half closed her eyes, and using the various movements as a thread, she strung all the old Southern melodies into a wonderful necklace of harmony. The violin sang and danced to "Dixie"; it marched and cheered to "Maryland, my Maryland"; it dropped a tear at the death of "Lovely Nell"; but through it all ran the clear, sweet strains of "My Old Kentucky Home." The boy in front of her tried at first to discover whether or not the music of the basic melody was continuous or whether the ear unconsciously supplied the missing intervals, but he could not tell, and he soon ceased to analyze and sat drinking it in with parted lips and eyes glued to the dark, flushed face of the girl who stood before him slowly swaying back and forth with the swing of the harmony. Then, as was usual with her music, the sadness began to predominate. The violin spoke the words "Like the shadow on the heart"—spoke them as clearly as the human voice could, and then went on to draw tense, inscrutable pictures of the utter blackness of that shadow.

Had there been a thousand listeners each would have received a different series of impressions, for music is but the spirit of many pictures. Even as every color has a sound, so does each different sector of the soul respond to its own peculiar tone. Vibration is life; wherever there is no vibration there is no life; and this untried boy who sat before her throbbed only to vague ideas of life. As yet there were no torturing experiences to stand up and smite him and mock at him and torture him as the shadow grew and grew and covered the heart from the light of hope and the glory of future joy.

In the center room of the suite a dark-faced woman leaned against the jamb of a partly opened door with her face shattered and rent like a landscape after the earth has quaked and the mighty forces of nature have worked their will. Her breath came and went in gasps, and there was a fierce defiance in the eyes, such as one might imagine upon the face of an angel who had taken part in the revolt against Omnipotence. As the music stopped, she sank upon a chair and covered her head with her apron.

For a second Jack sat motionless, and then he leaped to his feet and seized the girl's hand. "Ah, life—life—it is terrible! We awake upon the jutting crag above an abyss. Fog and cloud and rain are all about us; there is no one to question, there is no one to lead. Nachette, Nachette, tell me that I may walk by your side through all this terrible journey! I—I love you! I love you, I tell you! I do not ask for your love now; but you told me yourself that a woman wishes to be urged. I do not ask you to love me; but I do urge you to let me love you and watch over you and be with you. Ah, tell me I may!"

She looked at him frankly, and there was a shy tenderness in her glance. "You are not making your request to me, but to some one who has spoken through me. They crowd around me so when I play, they all want to tell their own stories, they—they make it so hard for me. You do not know me. How can you love me?"

There was naught of coquetry in her manner; it more closely resembled the candor of the first woman, who knew no conventionalities but spoke as she thought, with natural curiosity at the won-

ders of her own nature and with no feeling of the reserve which difference of sex seems to demand of the modern. "I do know you, and I know myself—I know myself for the first time. I know that my past life has been only the fluffy, superficial covering which protects the seed until it has had time to ripen and mature, but now I, the real I, have broken forth, and never again shall I waver in that for which I strive."

He was still holding her hand, his eyes were fever-bright and moist and passionate; he leaned forward and she did not draw away. Instead she seemed to lean slightly toward him. "I do not love you," she said musingly, "I am sure I do not love you. I have not the slightest fear of you. A woman always fears the man she loves. I could say farewell to you to-night and not grieve about you —and yet I care for you, I like to have you near me, I like to have you clasp my hand and feel your heart-beats meet and mingle with my own, as the deep motif of one melody meets and blends with the higher motif of another and both form a richer and stronger harmony than either did alone—but I do not love you."

He dropped her hand and stood facing her half resentfully. Was she a girl at all, this strange creature of moods and fancies and unrestricted candor? He was in deathlike earnestness, she was only puzzled. "May I come and see you often, so that we may see if you will learn to love me?"

"Even that I may not say. I have been under instruction and control so long that I seldom give a final answer upon anything without consulting my old nurse, and latterly, the Professor and the Prince."

"But tell me I may come." There was a deep pleading in his voice and her eyes grew warmer. At this juncture the door opened and Clarice entered with the refreshments.

That night, as she was being prepared for bed, Nachette surveyed her graceful form in the mirror and lightly questioned her maid: "Love—Clarice, does it ever come more than once?"

The woman turned and looked at the girl with inquiring eyes, but the girl smiled unconfused into her face, and Clarice finally said, somewhat petulantly: "What makes you study about love so much, honey? There isn't going to be any love-making for you for a long time yet. No, love never comes but once to the kind of woman that you will be, so you want to be mighty sure it's real love. O honey darlin', hate every man you see—don't trust a single one of them. If it is real love, you will lose anyway; but if it's not, you won't make the great mistake."

The girl laughed a low, musical laugh at the maid's intensity, and then said roguishly as she stretched luxuriously in the soft bed: "O Clarice, you are always so funny when you talk about love—a body would think that instead of being a modest and retiring spinster, you were a disappointed married woman. Good-night, Clarice. I am so sleepy and so deliciously weary that I know I cannot be in love as yet; good-night, old borrower of trouble."

The maid stood looking down at the sweet face with its snowy background, and her clasped hands twitched and her dark eyes were deep and sad as she said in a low tone: "Good-night—and God keep you, my little white flower.

CHAPTER IV

A FEW days after this, Professor Brahmfelder burst into the room where Nachette and Clarice were sitting, with his face aglow and his enthusiasm bubbling over like a surcharged siphon. "Now, now, now it is, that we make of ourselves greatness. It has at last come, the great day when Nachette, the Queen of Melody, shall play before the crowned heads. I haf myself arranged to go to Charmany, and there she will be the talk of Berlin, and the Kaiser will hear and the Kaiserin, and they shall say, 'Behold, efen a visiting queen has come to our domain, and we shall welcome her royally, as becomes royalty.' Ah, this is one great day!"

After a time the Professor dropped back to earth and made known the fact that he had arranged for a week of concerts at the Royal Theatre in Berlin, and that he had good friends there who would see that proper reports of her genius would be brought to the Court. Nachette was as jubilant as a child over a trip into the country, but Clarice was less certain as to the matter. "The Prince is opposed to such a move at this time, and as he is out of France just now, I should think it best to wait until his return."

"The Brince!" screamed the Professor with strident voice. "Was it the Brince who discofered Na-

chette? Was it the Brince who gave her the chance at the Opéra Comique? Was it the Brince who promised to make her the greatest musician of the age? No, it was I—Professor Brahmfelder. What is this Brince who has no country of his own? Only did I allow him to speak to Nachette because I thought he could the more easily introduce her to the courts of Europe; but no, he wants her to stay in a cage like some canary in the home of a peasant. Away with him! And when before did a maid take it upon herself to decide for her mistress? It would be well for you if you learned your place."

The eyes of the servant snapped as she looked down at the Professor, for she was the taller, but she said nothing, and Nachette it was who rebuked the Professor. "And what is your place, Professor? Are you my owner, or only my manager? Clarice is no mere hireling, she has been my nurse and my companion, and more. My own mother died at my birth and Clarice has been a real mother to me. I hope that you and she can get along well together. I am deeply thankful to you for having given me an opportunity, but if you two cannot get along in peace, why—I shall be sorry, but I can't give up Clarice, you know."

Her voice was perfectly calm, but there was a trace of gentle dignity in it which subdued the Professor as the perfect whip controls a horse—guiding, restraining, but not irritating. He looked at her with renewed admiration. "Of a truth, you are more than a queen of music. I did not mean to be harsh. Clarice—her motives I can fathom; but the Brince—who can see into his game? Why must we always wait to see what the Brince does or does not want? He is a bother."

"My dear Professor," said Nachette, "the Prince has always taken a great interest in my work; he became our confidant through your own choice; he has not the slightest ulterior object in my success. Now why do you take this sudden dislike?"

"It is not suddent. I haf t'ought of it efer since for a long while ago. He is not a goot man—his eyes, you cannot loog into them; his face—it smiles ven he would murder commit. Ven somebody says, 'Nachette, ven vill she mage again the public performance?' who answers? I say, who answers? Do I—I who discovered Nachette—get a jance to answer? No, de Brince, he bows an' smiles an' smirks an' loogs vise an' says, 'I am not sure, it is a madder vat requires most unusual study.' Him! vat about study knows he?"

"It really seems to me that I should be consulted a little myself," said Nachette, half amused and half in earnest.

"Well, I think that you all assume entirely too much concerning this poor child," interposed Clarice. "I have known her from the day of her birth, I have watched her grow and develop and——"

"Now as for you—I comprehent dat you are nod a customary serfant, but at de same time you are circumscript mit certain limitations. I—I am an impresario. I haf introduced de greatest arteests vat efer vas, I know all parts of de musigal vorlt, an' I say dat dot Brince shall not again take it upon his headt to efen offer a suggestion, oder I myself vill trow up eferyting and you vill not——"

At this moment there was a slight knock upon the door, which was immediately opened, and the Prince, debonair and handsome as usual, joined

them with his customary ease of manner. "Pardon my liberty, but I heard the Professor talking and so took it for granted that you would also be ready to welcome another old friend."

The Professor stood with the usual baffled expression which his face wore whenever the Prince took a situation. They all shook hands and the Russian took possession of Nachette, asking her half-joking questions as though she were a child. "Oh, by the way," he suddenly said, "I have arranged for you to go to Italy. You will play at the Regal. Rome will hear of it, the Quirinal will hear of it, you will be called to play before the King, and then——"

"She cannot go, she cannot go! Alreaty she has engaged herself to blay before de Kaiser, Bairlin; it is of a brominence vitch Italy can nefer haf. Vhy it is that you cannot learn to allow me, the impresario, to arrange for the arteestic career of Nachette?"

"My dear Professor, believe me, this is not so much an artistic matter as a social one," replied the Prince with perfect courtesy. "I never seek to offer even a suggestion where the question is one of music, but I have many influential friends at Rome. Rome at this season contains tourists from every quarter of the globe. I have planned a coup; but if you feel that your influence at Berlin is sufficient to arouse the same amount of kindly interest, I am more than ready to defer to your riper experience. I have many acquaintances at the German court, also. Whom do you rely upon to take a deep and personal interest in the career of our young violinist? If it were the piano now, there is Von Buehler, cousin of the Chancellor; or if Nachette

were a great singer, there are many who would be proud to champion her cause; but the violin — whom have you in mind?"

"Oh, vell—I haf not efery detail planned sufficiently out to mage to you a list off each step as it vill gome. If you had conferred vit me I am nod sure but vat I myself might haf been in fafor of Italy. The Italian court is partial the violin to, as I vell know. And then there is Marienino, he is considered the king off the violin. Nachette, she can take vit one schmall tune his crown away. As long as you haf it alreaty arranged, I am content to substitute the Italian for de Charman tour; but I insist that it at once be made."

There was no trace of triumph in the smile which the Prince threw upon the Professor. "Well, then, if it meets with the wishes of Nachette, we shall leave week after next. I trust that you, Professor, will make the proper arrangements for the public appearance. I shall write to a few friends to prepare them for a coming treat. And now, little one, how would you like a spin through the park? The air is bracing, the sky is bright, the humming of the machine makes a music which those clever ears of yours can transpose into loveliest melody—wilt thou come?"

There was an approving smile upon the face of Clarice, a happy one upon the face of Nachette, a complicated one upon the shrunken face of the little Professor beneath his massive brow and shaggy shock. In a few moments the big car whirled away and the Professor and Clarice turned from the window, the Professor saying, "Now, after I think of it, Von Buehler loves the violin efen so vell as he the piano loves. Dis Brince, he would mage me

belief dat snow vas made out off soft coal. I do not drust him."

"You are only jealous of his friends and his influence," said Clarice with the easy familiarity with which she invariably treated the Professor, much to the outrage of his idea of the fitness of things.

"I woold lige at some time to know the history of you—nefer haf I seen a serfant—even an olt family one—who took such a leading part in eferything vhich concerned her mistress as vat you do. Between you and dot Brince I feel me lige I vas a lap-dog."

"Well, I'm not studyin' about you much," said Clarice. "You know mighty well that Nachette has only to choose her managers, while you—well, where would you find another such an artist?"

"Manager! Me, Professor Brahmfelder, the impresario—me to be thus spoken at by a serfant—Mein Gott! Vell, you vill some day see vat it is dat I am. And you, what about you? Nachette might find one such another as me, but she could ten million better serfants as you find. Gonstantly I haf to assert my dignity, until almost I haf not any to assert. You vill drife—you vill drife me—you will drife me phrensical!"

"I never saw any dignity—any real dignity—which needed asserting," said Clarice in a mild and rather impersonal tone.

"Oh, mine gracious! How it is that one can act to a serfant who talks as though she vas a court lady? I subbose dat you also intend to go with me and with Nachette to the court?"

"Well," answered Clarice slowly, and with just a tiny glint of roguishness in her eyes, "I had scarcely thought about whether or not you would

go, but I certainly do intend to accompany Nachette and the Prince."

"The Brince! I vish the Brince had some affairs of his own to attend to. Vell, I cannot longer stay to waste my time upon a serfant. I go to prepare for the trip to Italy. You—you had better get a dust-cloth and the rooms straighten up."

The Professor slammed the door before Clarice had a chance to answer, and hurriedly made his way down town to see about his arrangements. On his way he met Jack Braxton, who rushed up to him and asked him of Nachette.

"She is vell, she is headstrong, she is like a queen mit me, ant like a school-girl mit dat serfant, ant de vorst of it is—she is out riting mit dot Brince. Vat do you vish to do—offer some blans for a drip to Africa? Eferyone seems to tink dey are in a position to assume de management of Nachette."

"You say she is out riding with the Prince—when will she return?"

"How could any man say vat she vill do—oder de Brince, eider? I haf business of importance. I haf decided to permit Nachette to blay before de King of Italy—you will oxcuse me? Goot-morning."

Braxton stood watching the Professor as he fluttered like a little sandbird down the boulevard. As Braxton stood gazing after him with a grim frown upon his face, he happened to glance up and saw a large touring-car approaching. It was driven by a chaffeur in rather conspicuous livery, and in the back seat sat Nachette and the Prince. He was leaning forward and looking intently into her eyes. She was smiling frankly into his, and the

frown upon Braxton's face deepened. Just as the car was on the point of passing, Nachette perceived him; a smile illuminated her face, and she waved her hand gaily. The smile was contagious—it flew to Braxton's eyes upon the wings of light, and in a second his whole face was aglow. He took off his hat and waved it boyishly to her and stood waving it until the car whirled out of sight. As a counteracting balance, the self-sufficient face of the Prince lost some of its complacency.

As Braxton stood looking at the spot where the car had vanished, another car emerged from it and rapidly drew toward him. It was driven by a bareheaded boy—a very large and exceedingly vigorous boy, who drew up at the curb and said: "Hello, Braxy; pile in and let's scoot over to somewhere."

Braxton "piled in" and said: "Turn around, Flossy, and open her up for Marcell Square—never mind why. I'll tell you next winter, but I want to get there *now*—hurry. I'll pay the fine if you win one."

"Flossy" apparently had a fund of good temper, for he instantly turned about and raced in the direction from which he had just come. He tried to talk at first, but soon gave it up in disgust. When they reached the corner designated by Braxton, he dismounted without further formality than to state, "Thanks, Flossy, you're the genuine reality. Now remember, there's one coming from me whenever you choose to cash in. Never mind waiting, I'll walk back."

Flossy looked solemnly into the face of his late passenger, raised his eyebrows, gave a slow wink, and started off in his car. Jack hastened to the corner, which commanded a view of the side door

of the Hotel Mercedes, where he had not long to wait before the Prince and Nachette returned. They talked together for a moment, then the Prince left and Nachette entèred the hotel. As soon as the touring-car had made a fair start, Jack hurried into the corridor and succeeded in attracting her attention before she entered the elevator.

She was frankly glad to see him and held out her hand, which he clasped warmly. "I understand that you are about to leave for Italy. May I come and see you to-night? I want so much to have a talk with you."

"Yes, you may come, but the Prince will be here also."

"Then most assuredly I shall not. The Prince is a fine fellow, and I greatly enjoy his company, but I like him much better at the club."

"Well, then—I cannot see why you would not like to come the same evening; but if not, you may come for a while to-morrow evening. And now, *au revoir!*"

"Until to-morrow evening, *au revoir!*"

A serious look came into his face, an amused look cāme into hers, and they parted with a cordial American hand-shake.

CHAPTER V

THE following evening Jack Braxton arrived at the hotel about seven. He walked by it hastily with only a fleeting glance, stopped at a corner two blocks up the street, looked back at the hotel, muttered a word which rhymed with "ham," crossed over to the next street, walked back two blocks, paused, gazed over at the hotel, and finally said: "Hang it! I act as though I were eighteen years old, going to call for the first time on my first girl. I know I'm not due until after eight. What on earth is there to do in this town to kill a bothersome hour? I hope no one has noticed me."

There was certainly little of stereotyped conventionality in the conduct of Mr. Braxton during the next sixty minutes. He circled about in the neighborhood like a soaring hawk swinging in wide circles in search of his prey. Ever and anon he would pause and revile his intensely modified idiocy, but at the same time he fairly reveled in the youthful exhilaration which was surging through his veins. Promptly at eight he knocked at Nachette's parlor, his face flushed and happy, and, in spite of himself, a trifle diffident. She was dressed in a simple, girlish dress, white and fluffy and low in the neck, with elbow-sleeves, and in her dark hair was a yellow rose.

Jack paused at the threshold in open adoration

while she held out her hands in frank and cordial welcome. She was in one of her happy moods when the careless smiles chased one another across her face and an entrancing roguery danced in her eyes.

"Come in," she said, with homely heartiness, "I am so glad to see you. If you were like a full-grown man you would bore me awfully this evening, because I feel like a little country girl, and I want to talk with a little—dare I say it, even to you?—country boy. I don't really want to talk, I want to go out into the moonlight—away, away from the hard, stuffy city—out to where the grass and the noisy night-things are, where one can run and race with head bare and the glad, cool air rushing by and patting one on the cheek as it passes. Wouldn't you like this immensely? Now don't look grave—tell me you are as anxious to be a child to-night as I am."

Mr. Braxton evidently was not. He continued to hold her hands while she swayed to and fro, but he refused to catch the desire for extreme youth. He was still young enough to treasure his dignity, and she had handled it entirely without ceremony.

"Why, of course I should like to do anything that you wanted to do, but frankly, I—to-night I wanted to tell you something very, very serious."

"Oh, pshaw! Why can I never find another soul to match my own? When I am sad, everyone else wants to be amused; when my spirits run and leap like kittens at play, everyone about me puts on a gloomy expression and says, 'Hush!'"

"Oh, now you have turned accuser and I needs must lower my flag. I'll tell you what we'll do: if Clarice will consent, we'll take a tram and hie away to Empire Park and play catch upon the green.

We may even be chased by the gendarmes, and if that will not make you feel like a really, truly mischievous girl, Paris has nothing else to offer."

"Oh, you are a dear!"

She said it lightly, but his face flushed pink. Of a truth, the journey back to childhood would be a trying one for him. At first Clarice refused absolutely; finally she consented reluctantly, and Nachette was delighted. "Oh, goody! We'll get some flowers, even if we have to get artificial ones, and we'll make her the Queen of the May. Come, Clarice, and dance with me, so that I may see if you take your part well."

Jack had finally caught the spirit of the game, and he took one hand of the reserved servant, and in spite of her dignity and evident reluctance they guided her through a grotesque dance, and in the end she was forced to smile.

"There's no knowing when your foolishness is going to break out. What I ought to do is to send one of you children about his business and put the other one to bed; but if you want to go out in the air for an hour—for just one hour, mind—why, run along and have a good time. You haven't had enough fresh air to-day, honey, and there isn't any harm in two young people as full of nonsense as you are."

And so they went, the boy and the girl, out into the moonlight—the white subtle moonlight which makes the world anew and fills it with strange visions and love-charms and sweetness and sadness, and life itself. And after a while they came to the park, and indeed they were but a boy and a girl. They did not stop at merely losing their own ages, they also lost the age of the world with its shallow

veneer of carefully applied civilization, and they drifted back and back to the day when there was music in laughter and poetry in motion, and much of discourse in the glancing of an eye. As they wandered carelessly along the sheltered paths they clasped hands unconsciously—at least instinctively—and then they ran side by side until she took a start and he caught her after a hard race; and then he took a start with the handicap of being forced to jump every twenty steps, and she finally caught him. They were breathless by this time, and the blood was hurrying through their veins with the swift pulsing of animal health. They walked slowly along the path, once more holding hands, and ever and anon coming close together with the warm touch of comradeship.

"I have something I want to tell you," began Jack, while his face grew grave. "I did not meet you merely by chance yesterday. Professor Brahmfelder told me of the coming trip to Rome, and I knew that I could wait no longer but must tell you at once. Come, let us sit on this bench."

"Why, what can it be? You are as serious as though you were about to tell me some terrible secret."

"It is a secret which I can keep no longer. And it depends entirely upon how you receive it whether or not it will be terrible—to me. Nachette, have you ever thought much of love?"

"Oh yes, indeed," answered Nachette without hesitation. "It is a favorite subject of mine."

Jack's face fell. "Have you ever been in love yourself?"

"Mercy, no! I have asked Clarice about it, and from what she has told me I never want to fall in

love—it must be terrible. I do not wish to lose my own identity nor the respect for the laws of God and man, and then, you know, a woman—at least the kind of a woman that I shall be—only loves once, and I want to know exactly what love is before I have it myself. Have you ever been in love?"

"Yes, Nachette, I am in love now, and I know I shall continue in love forever. The first time I ever saw the face of my love, a strange warm wave shot over me and I knew that I should never be the same again. It was not as if I were looking at a stranger, but as though my eyes rested upon the great reality of life which I had been unconsciously missing all these years. And as I looked, I seemed to see a beautiful garden in some warm country—Italy, or Greece, or even far away to the Orient—where the air was heavy with fragrance, and the nightingale was singing, and the moonlight was stealing through the foliage, to half disclose her loveliness and half veil it with mysterious suggestiveness. Ah, then I was in love, and now I am in love—for a love like mine is of immortality."

His voice was warm and tender, and the girl sat looking wistfully into his face. "That is very beautiful," she said finally, and at the words Jack's arm stole about her waist. "I came across those very words in two different books, and when I read them aloud to Clarice, she said that men always said them when they were making love; so you must really be in love. I believe that I should like to be in love, too."

Jack's arm made a hasty retreat, while a vexed expression gathered on his face, which her unfeigned sincerity made only the more intense.

"Come, let's go home," he said shortly.

"Oh no," answered Nachette, with the pleading pout of a spoiled child. "It is so beautiful here, and I want to know more about your love. You talk about love much nicer than Clarice does; she always seems to be bitter or scornful, and I don't like the way the Prince looks at me when he talks about love; but I do like your kind of love."

"The Prince? Has he told you that he loved you—has he asked you if you loved him—what has the Prince said about love?"

"Oh, he asked me if I loved him, and I did not know at that time; but I asked Clarice about it that night, and now I know that I do not love him."

"Do you—love me?"

She looked into his glowing eyes, a warm flush came over her face, and she drew a deep, quick breath. "Oh, I don't think I do—not the way that you said love makes one feel. I like you very much, and I—but I don't think I love you. Come, I am getting chilly; see how soon you can catch me, and then we must hurry home."

She darted away like a wild creature, while he sat moodily on the bench telling himself that she might run as far as she would and then come back, but that he would be trifled with no longer. But as she continued to run from him with her stray locks blowing in the moonlight, he arose and started after her. It was a long chase, and when he finally caught her in a clump of shrubbery they were both breathless. He put his arms about her waist and she leaned her head back on his shoulder with her warm cheek resting against his. They stood thus for some time, the two tingling cheeks pressing tighter and tighter together, while they felt more and more the life-charged nerves which met at

every point of contact, met and fused and became one. Slowly he turned her in his arms until both of her own were clasped about his neck and her body rested languorous and soft against his—and then, he kissed her: kissed cheeks and lips and hair and throat, kissed her roughly and passionately, while she clung to him with scarce a motion and with not a sound.

"Now do you love me? Do you love me now?" he asked her in a voice which trembled with the intensity of his emotion. She did not answer, she only clasped him the tighter, and again and again he kissed her. Finally he noted the dead weight of her body and the paleness of her face, and perceived that she had fainted. He carried her to a bench, and just as he was about to lay her down, she revived, put her arm about his neck, and kissed him.

"Do you love me now?" he asked her again.

"Oh, I am sure I do—this strange feeling which has taken possession of me—this must be love. I—I cannot tell you just how I feel. If I had my violin here I could play it. I have caught the faint echo of this wondrous feeling during certain passages in old love-songs, but I had no idea that there was any emotion in all the world like the one which has taken possession of me now."

"Tell me you love me and kiss me again."

"Oh, no—no, I mustn't! I know I have done wrong already, but—it came so unexpectedly—it was like the rushing of a torrent. I am not like other girls, you know. I have never had a close friend in all my life. Clarice would never even allow me much with other girls, and never at all with any men or boys except you and the Prince.

She always told me never to talk or even think much about love. She said that she herself wanted to teach me all about life that I should ever know. I—we must hurry home now as quickly as possible. I want to kiss you, I want to put my arms about your neck again and have you clasp me tight to your breast, but I mustn't. You won't ask me to, will you?"

He looked into her eyes: they were brilliant as stars reflected from a limpid spring, and they were tender and pleading. It was like tearing his heart out by the roots; but he rose to his feet with a deep, full breath and said, "No, dearest, I shall not ask you." Jack Braxton had become a man.

They walked rapidly home, and there was but little said between them. Jack took her to the door of her apartment and asked if she wished him to come in. For a moment she pondered, and then said, "No." He stooped and took her hand and held it while he said, "Nachette, I love you; it is no mere passing fascination. I shall love you whether you return it or not. I do not ask for a speedy answer, I do not ask for any promise; but I do want you to know that night or day, rain or shine, good fortune or bad, wherever you are or wherever I am, I shall be loving you and thinking only of your happiness, and ready and anxious to do only that which will give you lasting joy."

He bent reverently over her hand and kissed it, and then he turned and walked down the corridor, very straight and very tall. She stood and watched him until he had nearly reached the elevator, and then she called softly after him, "Jack, oh, Jack!"

He hastened back to her, but she held up a warning hand, which halted him a few steps from her

side. "I am not sure, you know," she said in hesitating embarrassment, "but I can't let you go without telling you that I think—I love you. No, no—not now, you must wait until I am sure."

The whole weary world seemed illuminated by the glory of the love-light in their eyes as they stood with the narrow space still between them; but there was naught of fondling, save in the caressing tenderness of their glances, and then she turned and entered the room, leaving him alone in the haze of a rosy mist. He stood for a few moments as one dazed by sudden joy, and then he also left the corridor, but whether he reached the ground floor by the elevator or floated down upon a cloud, he neither knew nor cared.

Nachette entered the room, her face aglow with smiles, but these instantly vanished as she saw the stern face of Clarice. Never in all her life had she seen such an expression upon it—fierce, bitter, and accusing. They looked at each other for a moment, and then, for the first time in her life, Nachette laid stress upon their different positions. "Clarice," she said, with quiet dignity, "I wish some coffee and an ice."

Clarice sank into a chair, buried her face in her arms, and sobbed the dry choking sobs which seem to tear one to pieces. She knew too well whence came this new assurance. Nachette walked over to the window and gazed down into the garden below. She also was aware of an almost miraculous change in herself, a new strength, a new independence, a new confidence in her own inner impulses. She forgot the many years during which she had asked this sobbing woman for the answer to each new question; she only remembered that the years

of loving faithfulness and never-wearying care counted for nothing, and that this woman was merely her servant, having no right to judge her, no right to question her even by a glance, no right to do aught but carry out her wishes, and she turned and said, "Clarice, I told you I wished some coffee and an ice; please get them at once."

The woman raised her face, and her cheeks were gray and haggard. There were no solacing tears in the dry, hurt eyes which burned into those of this new, strong woman before her; there was no trace of anger, but the anguish which burned there like a dull red coal seemed also to sear the eyes of the girl.

"Coffee and an ice—coffee and an ice! O child, child, you have broken my heart! I am your servant, your slave, but I am also something more. Ever since the day of your birth I have watched each change in your life with a hungry, jealous fear, but never before did you fail me. Girl, do you know what time it is?"

"I suppose it is about ten," answered Nachette in a voice which vainly endeavored to maintain a calm level. She was beginning to remember that this servant had devoted her life to unquestioning service, to service which money could never have purchased, and she also found that the tendrils of her own life had so twined and intermingled with the life of Clarice, that the wrench which tore them apart would be like unto death itself. There was no anger in the eyes of either now. Clarice recognized that with the bursting of the blossom of womanhood, the beloved, capricious child was lost to her forever. Never again could there be perfect confidence; never again those naïve questions

which were asked in such innocent candor—the answers to which were received in such absolute faith; and her great sorrow had melted away all trace of bitterness. In a measure, the sensitive girl felt this and it aroused her deepest sympathy.

She rushed impetuously to the older woman and put her arms about her neck. "What time is it, honey dear? I know it is late from the way you look—but oh, I have had such a good time, and am filled with such new and wonderful emotions. I seem to thrill like a violin to-night. Where is my dear old fiddle? It must tell you just how I feel. What time is it?"

"It is nearly one."

The girl's eyes opened wide—partly from honest surprise, partly because of the solemn accusation in the tone.

"O Clarice—surely not so late as that! We did have the loveliest time—but really I had no idea it was very late."

Nachette was on her knees now, with her elbows in the lap of her old nurse, and the tender arms which had tried to shield her all her life were folded in comfort and protection about her shoulders. For a minute Clarice stroked the girl's head in silence, and then she said softly, "Tell me all you can, dearie. Don't be afraid—it is better to tell me all."

"Why, there isn't so awfully much to tell. We ran until we were out of breath, and then he caught me in his arms—I did not fight him off, you know—I—I was rather glad that he did catch me in his arms, and then he kissed me, and I fainted away. When I recovered, I kissed him and he wanted to know if I loved him. I told him that I thought I did, but was not sure."

"Where were you when you fainted away?"

"We were in the park. I did not feel weak or sick when I regained consciousness—I felt as though I were on a cloud floating from paradise to heaven."

"What did he do when you kissed him?"

"He kissed me over and over, and wanted me to kiss him again; but I told him, no, not until I was sure that I loved him. And then I told him that he must not kiss me any more."

"Did he try to kiss you again?"

"No, he just looked at me as though he would have liked to eat me—and then he drew a long breath and stood up straight and tall—and we came home together."

"Why didn't he come in?"

"He wanted to, but I did not want him. I don't know why—part of me wanted him very much, but another part of me said no."

"Did he kiss you good-night?"

"No, but he wanted to. I could tell by his eyes."

"You have gone a long journey this night, little girl, but you have come back to me safe, and I shall watch over you. And so you can read a man's eyes now? Jack Braxton—well, in spite of the name, he is still a gentleman."

Clarice was thinking aloud rather than talking. "The name, Clarice? Do you not like the name?" asked Nachette quickly.

"No, dear, not very well. You must not see him alone any more—I wish that you would never see him again."

"But you said that he was a gentleman; why must I never see him again? Oh, I must see him again!"

Clarice sat in silence while the different theories of love made their arguments.

"Honey, dear, you do not care for him much now—you have the whole world before you, and you have your art with which to win it. What has he to offer you? He seems to be a nice sort of a boy, but what has he to offer? You have often longed for the day to come when the world would be at your feet—it is here now. Are you going to give up your chance?"

They sat in silence, the eyes of the woman upon the girl, the eyes of the girl upon the floor. Finally Clarice said: "Many and many a time, even when you were but a child, you have let your violin decide for you, and it was always right; will you try it now?"

"O Clarice, I am afraid to! I don't want to give him up—and I don't want to give up my ambition. Can't I have both?"

"No, child; ask your violin."

Half reluctantly, Nachette arose and tuned her violin. She stood for a long time with it pressed against her cheek, while shade after shade swept across her face. "Oh, I can't, Clarice, I can't! I was so full of joy when I came in to-night, and now I see nothing but sadness."

"Ask the violin"—all the woman's strong will power was focused in her quiet voice.

Suddenly the bow swept across the strings and a weird wail came from the instrument. The monody rose and fell—bitterness and sadness, violent anguish and plaintive sobbing, occasional bursts of passionate love, but through all, the biting sting of sorrow and disappointment. Presently Nachette sank upon a chair and buried her face in her arms.

"Oh, the violin says that I must not have him—that I must give him up forever, and now I know that I love him—I love him—I love him! I would be willing to suffer anything with him, but I do not want him to suffer too. Oh, life—how cruel it is!"

Once more the old nurse took her into her arms, soothed her, and finally coaxed her away to the comforting forgetfulness of sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE Prince lived at the club, but in several widely separated parts of that strange human warren called Paris he had beautiful apartments which he visited occasionally under various names. Upon the night following his drive with Nachette, he sat in the richly furnished rooms of one of these suites, the dreary exterior of which gave no hint of the gorgeous luxury within. The lights were encased in different colored globes, the blending harmony of which added to the barbaric richness of the furnishings. The Prince reclined upon a Turkish divan heaped with pillows and idly watched the curling smoke of his cigarette. He wore black trousers, but his coat was of purple satin embroidered with gold. It was peculiarly fitted to his romantic features, and he made a handsome picture in perfect keeping with the surroundings.

A swarthy servant with catlike tread stepped from between two heavy pieces of tapestry, and bowing low, offered a silver salver upon which lay a card. The Prince picked it up lazily; a quick change shot across his face and he said: "The Countess! Why and from where? Admit her, Ivan, and then put out the signal-lamp. Under no conditions admit anyone else."

The Prince rose to his feet and endeavored to compose his features to their usual nonchalance,

but it was easy to see that he was perturbed. Again the tapestry parted, and a woman entered. She was tall and perfectly developed, her eyes were dark, but their colorings were violet rather than brown. Her brows were clear cut and commanding without losing the effect of femininity, which was her salient characteristic. The Prince hastened to meet her, but without giving him a chance to speak, she said, "Whom did you expect this evening?"

"Ah, Nina, you were ever a doubter! You shall stay until the evening flees before the dawn and thus shall see whom I expect. But really, sweetest heart, I expected nothing but lonesomeness. I fear that I am far from sensitive; how could so sweet a surprise as this have failed to start my heart beating tumultuously? Sit down."

He motioned her toward the divan, but instead she chose a low chair and sat looking at him as though to read his inmost secrets. "Why should any woman love you?" she finally said with a disdainful smile. "Selfishness is the most despicable human trait, and you are the most selfish man in all this world. Why did you not send for me? Where is your wife—and who is this Nachette?"

The Prince sat up with a frown upon his face. "And if questions are to be the order of the day—why are you here—when did you arrive—and what of Nachette?"

"I arrived two days ago. Nachette is the answer to both your first question and your last. You must not think that after risking my life and my honor for you, I will quietly await the gracious moment of your convenience. Again, where is your wife?"

"I honestly do not know—I do not even know that I have a wife."

"Then I am more fortunate than you, for I do know whether or not you have a wife. Are you ready to marry me before the world—if I am ready to consent?"

"Yes," answered the Prince with a resolute note in his voice; "name the day."

"To-morrow," returned the Countess without a moment's hesitation, "to-morrow morning at ten."

"Now you very well know that it will be impossible at such short notice."

"It is not short notice. Three years ago your promise was that the very second I should consent, you would achieve your happiness. Ah, Alexander, these three years, they have been very long."

"Yes, but I have not seen you for more than a year. The Czar—what of him?"

"The Czar is as he was. Poor man, he has only my sympathy. Will you or will you not be ready at ten? I am not trying to urge you, but I wish to know exactly where you stand."

"Tell me how you know that I am free—and also how you knew where to find me to-night."

"And also how I know the other apartments similar to this; and also how I know of your infatuation and fascination for that poor, strange, wonderful child they call Nachette; and also how I know that you are very hard pressed for ready money; and also how I know most of your other private matters. You forget that I am but lately from the court of St. Petersburg, in close touch with all its intricate devices for gathering desired news. You may have lost your last chance; it may be that if you had appeared anxious to marry me I should have told you at the last moment that you were not free to

wed—but that you were free forever from the Countess Nina."

The Prince sprang to his feet and hurried to her side, the scarlet passions of his nature flaming his cheek, while his eyes glowed brilliantly beneath his sweeping brows. "I do not wish to be rid of you—never—never—never! Do you think, Nina, that this half-formed child could ever crowd you from my heart? In all the world there is no woman fit to stand beside you. I love you, I love only you—and ever and always, I shall love no other."

The burning intensity of the Prince's voice was absolutely sincere. He had risked his all for this woman—she had risked her all for him. They had dared to stand in the very shadow of the throne and cross the purpose of the great white Czar. Used to an absolute indulgence in his own whims, Prince Alexander might for a time be angry at the inflexible, wild, and dauntless courage of the woman who now smiled into his eyes, half in triumph, half in love which acknowledged and admired; but at the possibility of losing her, his passion for her, which at all times was strong, rushed back and insisted upon its rights. He knelt at her side and buried his face in her lap while she stroked his dark curly hair. They remained in this position for several moments. As she sat with a warm flush upon her cheek, strength and tenderness in every line of form and feature, she seemed the highest type of womanhood; and yet the one love of her life had gone forth to a man whose own love had no focus, but who sipped the honey from every flower he passed. The marks of the beast last long—but the end is not yet.

After a space, the Prince raised his face and

looked intently into that of the woman who bent above him. The love-light shining from both their eyes, the warm flush of expectancy glowing upon their cheeks, the slightly audible breathing—all plainly denoted that the crescendo of love was slowly swelling to its climax.

"Come, dearest heart," said the Prince, rising to his feet, drawing her up with him and folding her in his arms as they slowly walked to the far end of the long room. Twice they paused while she raised her lips to his and he pressed kiss after kiss upon them. At the curtained door they paused once more, and as he bent and kissed her on lip and cheek and throat, her white, round arm reached upward and stole about his neck, while her eyes half closed in ecstasy.

"To-morrow at ten, to-morrow at ten—tell me, love of my life, will you be willing—will you be glad to marry me? Oh, if you do not wish it—if you are only doing it to spare yourself either a woman's tears or her revenge, tell me now, tell me frankly—now, when I love you more than myself, my future life, and all the world beside," she whispered.

Not the faintest shade was perceptible upon the face of the Prince; a deep, serious expression came to his eyes, and he held her a little away from him. "Nina, I have never loved another woman but you. The love of conquest is strong within me, and I woo women much as I game with men—generally by fair means—always to win, but it is not the prize which draws me on. Always it is the excitement, the element of chance, the stimulus to arouse the forces of my intellect, the sharp-shooters of my wit; to send forth a glance from my eyes like the

sudden charge of light cavalry, to distract attention by a smile as a general makes a flank movement. I delight to exercise the executive side of my nature—but 'tis not love. I love you and you only, and you will be sure of it—to-morrow at ten."

"I believe you—I believe nearly all you have said. In a measure I can understand and sympathize with your attitude; but is there no fitter game to play than to win the fleeting love of shallow women or the small stakes at a card-table? Does life itself offer no chance to do and dare, to plot and plan, to match wit against wit, and to throw your very future into the pool, risking your life and peace to win ambition's fairest prize?"

The Prince drew back a pace, and they stood facing each other. "And so the old game still draws you on?" he said musingly. "It has been long since it has seemed a reality to me, but when I am with you, all that you say seems to point to a higher, richer, fuller life. To-morrow at ten, and after that—who knows?"

"And do you think you can be faithful to me?" There was naught of the leader in her voice; it was the woman only who spoke. "Will not the old lust of conquest return? You know me, Alexander, and—and I am not a woman to trifle with."

"There is not the slightest fear. What is life stripped of its emotions? Flat and insipid as lukewarm water—it would fairly sicken me. I must throb and thrill, rejoice and sorrow, expect and doubt—in a word, I know my nature and refuse to starve it. Never was there a man upon this sphere who so perfectly felt the truth of the old discovery that each human is but the half of a perfect being. Alone, there is no balance to me; but when I am

with you, I feel your nature begin wherever mine stops, complete the circle of strength, and join me again. Is it not a grand thought? I seem to feel that your body and my body, your soul and my soul, are simply indivisible parts of a single identity which itself is lost in the unity of nature. No; when we are wed you need have no fear of me, but now I am like a ship without its rudder."

The Prince sat down, and the soul which looked out of his eyes was one to be trusted; and the woman came to him, looked in through his eyes, and was convinced. She took his face between her hands, drew him to her, and said softly and tenderly and sadly: "Oh, I am so sorry! I only did it to see if you really did love me. Your wife is still alive, but she is expected to die at any moment. Her life has been a sad one, but the end is quiet, peaceful, and very beautiful. She has never spent a cent of the money which you sent her, but has given it all away in simple charities. Some time I shall tell you of her. We have but a little while to wait now, dear heart; can you not be true to me?"

There was a slight frown upon the face of the Prince. It nettled him to see how much better informed Nina was than himself, and also he greatly disliked subterfuge of any kind—in another. Moreover, he could not resist the feeling that he had promised to do a very noble thing in agreeing at once to the marriage, and it nettled him to be unable to consummate this noble deed. "I do not see why it was necessary to resort to a trick. Surely your intuition might have told you."

"And these other women—have they not intuition also?"

"There is no use in my attempting to argue when

you choose the opposite side," said the Prince with an admiring smile; "but if you will stay with me always, I can promise you never to crave any more of femininity than your own very complete and complex self can furnish. Come, the night is swiftly drifting by."

He sought to draw her through the door which led from the larger room, but she held up a tapering finger and slowly shook her head. "No—never more until we have the right. I suppose you will think me foolish, but we have been apart for so long now that I almost feel as though I had not yet been won and that you must still woo me with sighs and kisses. Oh, won't you help me to pretend that I am still a bashful girl, tremblingly advancing along the flowery pathway of love to the Castle of Delight? It is silly and childish, but it is dear to me; won't you help me to pretend?"

Lightly he clasped her in his arms, and softly he kissed her on the brow, and then he put her dainty wrap about her shoulders and led her to the door. There was a true reverence in his face as he said softly: "Dearest one, I will help you to pretend by pretending with you. May I see you to your hotel now?"

"No, thanks, my own true Prince, I want to go alone; but oh, the heart in my bosom is singing! Good-night, and for a little while good-by."

And again the Prince sat upon the Turkish divan while the colored lights shone on long after the sun had come to make beautiful the outer world.

CHAPTER VII

DURING the next week the Herr Professor was the busiest and the happiest man in all Paris. He wrote numerous letters to Rome, he made full and complete arrangements for advertising, and he took personal supervision of Nachette's practising. He had induced Marienino, among other artists, to take part in the concert, and was in a perfect flutter of expectation. Through his wide knowledge he was able to unearth some curious Italian folk-songs, old and familiar among the peasantry, but seldom heard among the highest musical circles. These appealed strongly to Nachette, as did everything quaint and whimsical, and the undercurrent of sadness and longing, common to all humble melody, fitted in perfectly with her present mood.

In her one brief conversation with Jack she had told him that she did not think that she truly loved him, and that even if she did, her art demanded her and she could not divide her personality. He had been manly and dignified and had said that he would not ask of her more than she felt free to give, that he himself would never be content with a life grudgingly shared with the great audiences to whom she would play in her career; then he had sat silent for a long time, while she had looked at him wistfully. When he had risen to say good-by, there was a set

to his jaw which made his simple words very impressive. "Good-by, Nachette. I know that you are different from all other women. I know that the world holds out crowns of laurel to you, but I also know that somewhere in your heart there is a longing for something closer and dearer than anything your public life can supply. I shall not beset you with annoying pleadings, but wherever you are, there shall I also be, and when the time comes that you want me, you have only to hold out your arms and I shall come."

"Shall you be at Rome?"

"Shall you?"

"Why, of course."

"That likewise is my answer. Good-by."

The Regal Theatre was decorated with flags, flowers, and bunting, which the soft light from the myriad candles made warm and melting. The house was filled to the doors, and there was a flutter of excitement which continued throughout the overture. Rome had heard much of this young violinist, and knew that by comparing her with their own Marienino they could tell just how near she came to real greatness. They expected to be entertained and they were ready to offer her every encouragement, but still they looked upon her as a child-prodigy rather than as a great artist.

The concert opened with a grand chorus of trained voices, then a duet by Salventero and Marseillie, after which Marienino gave his first number. He was a handsome man of commanding presence, his passionate eyes, black hair, and turned-up mustachios giving a romantic touch to his typical Italian features. He was greeted by a burst of applause,

and stood smiling and bowing with complacent self-assurance. The cheering continued until it became an ovation, and he was artist enough to use it to the best advantage. Holding a graceful hand before him, he gently shook his head as though to reprove them for forgetting their mutual guest, while at the same time he thanked them for the kindly welcome to himself. It was done with simple sincerity and caught the admiration of the audience, which continued its applause with renewed vigor.

In the midst of it he motioned to the leader, raised his bow, and swept into the strains of "The Victory." The vast concourse was immediately hushed to silence, and the clear, round tones from his violin flowed forth with absolute precision and brilliant expression. It was a critical assemblage, that fully appreciated the splendid technique of his marvelous performance. When he finished, the house arose in a storm of applause, which he again checked by playing an encore. He once more chose a selection very difficult for the violin, and at its close hastily withdrew, but was recalled three times, each time, however, contenting himself with a graceful bow.

And then from the opposite side of the stage Nachette appeared. She was dressed in a simple gown of white, which made her appear a mere child, and there was no confident ease in her step as she gracefully took her place. The greeting was a kindly one, but there was no spontaneous outburst; rather it seemed a friendly effort to encourage her. But she did not pause; she placed her violin in position at once, and as the house grew still she played the Sacrifice from the opera of "Attillius." Her eyes were half closed, and as she swayed lightly

to and fro she seemed to have totally forgotten her environment. It was a piece fully as difficult as the one with which Marienino had opened, but as she played she occasionally put in little runs and variations of her own. Her tiny fingers danced over the strings, the bow darted forward and backward, but the girl herself stood with a dreamy, far-away expression upon her face.

As she finished and started to leave the stage, there was a moment of silence, and then here and there the applause started, which was soon taken up by the entire audience, but it was noticeable that the heartiest expression came from the foreign element. This girl was no child to need encouragement. She seemed more like an invader come to wrest away the title from their beloved country. They could not give her that unrestrained commendation which they would have delighted to shower upon one of their own. It is often easier to be generous than to be just.

As encore she rendered a medley. It had been carefully arranged by the Herr Professor and included the most difficult portions of many operas. She had objected that there was not enough melody, and he had replied: "Melody—it is off an incidentalness. Technique—that is what you must prove. Then later, some other time, you can the melody perform. A street boy can make melody upon a harmonica—are you a street boy, or are you an artist?"

Still, in her practising the abnormal ear of the girl had caught a fantastic strain and she had interwoven it into the melody without disturbing a single note, but at the same time giving it an individualistic motif. As she played this with the same

simple, careless air, her auditors were forced to admit—some to their great delight and some in spite of themselves—that she had won her right to the title of Queen. The applause which greeted her this time was spontaneous and full. They did not like to acknowledge that Marienino had a peer, but their own musical reputations were at stake and they were forced to show to their friends that they fully appreciated the grandeur of her work.

Two vocal solos were next on the bill, and then Marienino gave his last number. It was a medley of love-songs—Tyrolean, Venetian, Tuscan—simple, tender melodies strung together with intricate art. It touched the national heart, and at its close his auditors applauded rapturously. Men shouted bravos, women blew kisses and waved handkerchiefs, and the stage was heaped with flowers. There was a mist in the eyes of the great violinist as he tried to thank them.

Professor Brahmfelder in the wings was beside himself with nervousness. He wrung his hands, smiled in anticipation, and then he took a few hasty strides. Nachette was to play her selections from the folk-songs next, and he could hardly wait until he saw how they would be received. She took her place, the orchestra played the interlude, and then as her eyes chanced to glance about the audience she saw Jack. In an instant her face lighted with a smile, and the next moment she had motioned to the leader to stop. The heart of the Herr Professor stopped at the same time. He well knew the uncertainty of all great musicians—the absolute impossibility of foretelling their next move.

As she began, great beads of perspiration came upon his forehead and he tore his hair in anguish.

She was playing "My Old Kentucky Home"—playing it as she had played it for Jack that night. In fact she was playing it to Jack. These other people did not matter. She knew that he would like it, and as she played she tried to tell him that she was thinking of him and that it would all come right some day. She talked to him through her violin, and as she played all her listeners felt the peculiar whispering closeness of the tones, as if she were taking each one into her confidence. They recognized the novelty of the variation, but did not suspect that it was an improvisation; and as the violin is a trifle weak without accompaniment, they felt that in her last attempt she had fallen short of their own master, and supposed that, realizing the selection which she had chosen for her closing number was inadequate to the occasion, she had at the last moment selected a new one in the hope of equaling his grand finale. We see as we wish to see, and they thought they saw a confession of defeat; so they gave her their applause freely, and with parting vivas for Marienino, the concert came to a close.

Many flowers were sent to her, but the thing which caused a stir throughout the entire house was the sight of a young man coming to the front of the royal box, pulling a ring from his finger, and casting it upon the stage. It was the Duke of Tergary, in direct line to the succession, and a man whose coming marriage was current talk. He was tall, slender, and handsome, while his dark eyes glowed as he watched her stoop and pick up the ring. Then he withdrew and the theater quickly emptied.

As she left the stage, a happy smile upon her

face, the Herr Professor seized her by the shoulder and gave her a hearty shaking. "You a great arteest!" he exclaimed. "No—you are a great child! What do you mean? Why do you do such a things? When you haf the great melody which would have won them, why do you a foolish minstrel-nonsense play? Oh, you haf now your great chance ruined—and mine!"

Nachette was too happy to pay much heed to him; she had seen Jack's face light up and she had also seen that her selection had been favorably received. "Oh, never mind, Professor, we have still to-morrow night and the night after. And besides, one was pleased. See?"

She held out the hand upon one of whose fingers glistened the diamond ring. He took the hand and looked at the ring. "Where did you get this? From that Brince without a country, I suppose."

"No, a young man in the box to the right threw it to me. Is it not beautiful? I wonder if I should keep it or try to return it?"

"Which box?"

She described it, and his face became wrinkled with nervous excitement. "What! Why, that is the royal box! Ha-hum—well! Oh, if you could only learn to do what you were told we could march at once into the Temple of Fame. The royal box —ha-hum! Now, listen. To-morrow night, will you promise me with the Italian folk-song selection to close?"

"Yes, Professor—unless I should happen to see——"

"What you should happen to see, I do not care. What I want is your promise. Will you give it to me?"

"Yes," answered Nachette, "I shall play it to-morrow night."

The next night the house was packed, while a crowd waited outside to catch news of what went on within. It was well known by this time that this was no mere trial of a new possibility. This was a duel for the acknowledged supremacy in the realm of the violin.

The bill was much the same as upon the preceding night. They both chose difficult opening numbers, and at his last performance Marienino played a medley composed of Italian refrains and once more received an ovation.

As Nachette appeared for her last number, she paused and her eyes roved about the house. As the cheering subsided, she smiled, gave a whimsical little bow as though to ask pardon for taking a liberty, and then the orchestra played the prelude to her medley of folk-songs. It was a marvelous selection; just the refrains from quaint old melodies which they had heard from childhood, strung together to suit her own fancy and then smoothed out and made accurate by the Professor. There was still room for some of her spontaneous improvisation, and as she played—now a crooning cradle-song, now a tender, pleading bit from some old love-ballad, now the sad wail of women who mourned for the men who had fallen in battle, and finally ended with a mountain dirge—she seemed to be painting a picture, a full canvas upon which stood the peasant of Italy with his entire life, which reached back into the history of the past and ahead into the history still to be written.

The auditors became spectators; they saw that the peasantry of a nation is the nation itself, and

that these simple, hard-working people, whose ancestors had sung the songs which were being played upon the stage before them, had suffered much, had borne much, but at the same time had furnished the world with its musicians, its sculptors, and its artists—its workers and its warriors.

As Nachette finished, a perfect furore of applause burst forth, and in the midst of it Marienino rushed upon the stage clasping his violin close to his breast. His face was pale, and lines upon his cheeks showed where the tears had coursed unheeded. He raised his hand for silence, and as the applause died away he tried to speak. Twice his trembling voice refused to obey, and then it came full and sweet and resonant:

"Ah, she has come—she can do that which I have tried all my life to learn, but could not. She was never taught music—it is a gift. For her there is harmony in a storm, for her the creaking of a wagon becomes the high notes in a grand orchestra. In all the world there is no discord for her, because she has the key for every sound, can match it into its proper place, and fit the other sounds which make music. I know—I alone know how great she is. I have felt enough of this to yearn for more; but I can go no farther. I am an old man now. My hair and my mustachios—they are gray. I have dyed them because I did not want even my mirror to tell me that my body was growing old while my soul still longed for the coming of that day when my ear could catch the entire harmony of life. I am old, I am old. There is no future for me in this life—and never again shall I play upon the violin. See my violin—the great treasure of my life—the violin which is known to every child

in Italy, to every musician in the world—I break it across my knee. I shall never play again."

He raised the violin and held it before them, while a shudder of horror swept through the assembly. They knew the story of the old violin, they knew how he prized it, they knew that none but himself had ever touched it since the first time his hand had guided a bow across its strings, and it seemed murder—the murder of a great citizen. Nachette could not understand Italian readily, but she was able to catch the thread of his meaning, and the expression upon her face became one of terror. This great master to break his famous violin upon her account! She well knew that it would also be to break his own heart. For a moment she stood with eyes staring as though paralyzed, and then an inspiration came to her.

She stepped to his side and placed a cool hand upon his feverish one. He turned and looked into her eyes, and then she turned to the audience and spoke with the slow, painstaking articulation which her lack of practice compelled her to use.

"Listen to me. You cannot understand the soul of this man, but I can. I also am like unto what he was like when he was young and before he had developed into the master of the violin. He seeks to encourage me, and in the greatness of his soul he is willing to make the grand sacrifice of his life. He thinks that if he should make this sacrifice, I should feel the responsibility of it and would never desert my art, but would devote my entire life to making my playing perfect. But he is wrong. I refuse to accept the responsibility. If he destroys his violin"—she paused a moment, while the audience leaned forward in tense silence—"I also shall

destroy mine, and never again shall *I* play a violin."

Marienino turned and seized her wrist. "No, no—I forbid it. You have no right, you are young, you have all before you. You start farther ahead than I was able to climb. Say you will not do it—say you will not do it!"

She looked him between the eyes, and her own were hard and determined. "I shall do it. You have no right to put this responsibility upon me. Or—come, take my hand and we shall bow to these kind friends who have been so patient with us. Will you promise to not give up your music—promise for my sake? I want you to show me certain things which only you know. Will you promise?"

He took her hand and turned to the audience. "This is not only the Queen of Melody—she is also the Queen of Women." And then the pent-up emotions of the audience gushed forth.

When Nachette turned to leave the stage, for the applause seemed interminable, the young Duke of Tergary again leaned from the royal box and threw a single blood-red rose at her feet. As she reached the wings, Professor Brahmfelder greeted her with an ecstatic hug. "Ah, it was beautiful! Nefer do I know what you will do; but that saving of his violin—it was most beautifully planned. How did——"

"Planned?" The word shot from between her teeth as though it were the bolt from a gun.

The Herr Professor looked up into eyes which were blazing with righteous anger. "Well, my child, if it had been planned, it could not better haf been done. All over the world it vill ring, and

wherefer you go you vill be pointed out as the woman about which the great Marienino was going his violin to destroy. Oh, it was grand good luck—if it vas luck—and I believe it vas."

At the close of the next evening's performance an impressive envelope was delivered to the Herr Professor. It contained a request that Nachette be allowed to appear at the Quirinal before their Majesties the King and Queen of Italy. The Professor was beside himself with joy. That same evening a small, scented note was handed to Nachette. As she was arranging her toilet preparatory to leaving the stage, she asked Clarice to read it. It was from the Duke of Tergary, beseeching her to make him an appointment and protesting that he had never seen a woman who had made such an impression upon him. At first Clarice was disposed to tear up the note without letting Nachette read it; but a certain subtle something which had grown up between them since the night when Jack had told her his love, prevented.

Nachette read it, reread it, tore it up, and said with a happy, girlish laugh, "What silly things mĕn are—I mean, most men."

And the concluding phrase caused a shadow to cross the face of Clarice, which the opening phrase had wreathed in smiles.

CHAPTER VIII

PRINCE ALEXANDER had been very kind to Nachette during her visit to Rome, but his attentions had been all the more welcome because he himself had been but little in her company. He had seen that the proper word had been given to the proper group so that her first appearance would receive a fitting reception; he had seen that her flowers were provided, and in numerous tactful ways he had used his influence to aid her. Nachette knew this and appreciated it, and she was right in suspecting that the Prince was also largely responsible for the invitation to appear at the Quirinal.

Jack, too, had kept himself in the background, but she had seen him at each performance, she had been able to detect his flowers, and once, just as she was about to retire, she had glanced out of the window and had seen him slowly walking past on the opposite side of the street. Clarice, too, had noted the studious manner in which Jack had kept himself in the background, and while she was forced to admit that he was living up to the letter of his promise, it irritated her to know that he was ever within easy call.

As the hour drew near when Nachette was to leave for the Italian court, her heart began to beat with exhilaration. She loved to call herself an

American, thinking that this implied an independent and democratic temperament; but we are slaves to a name long after the reality for which that name was originated has ceased to exist. "To play before the King"—there was still much romantic glamour in the sound, as though even yet one continued to wear one's head only by regal sufferance. And to no other person does the word "king" convey such a thrilling mental picture as to the true American. The American desires supremacy in all things, and alas! he has no king of his own. The President, be his personality what it may, is only a fleeting and temporary ruler, and at times is spoken of as the servant of the people. To be sure, there is much of satire in this, but still the expression is common, as common as some of our presidents—may be, in the course of time. And furthermore, a king reigns by the grace of God, while a president rules by the whim of a very capricious electorate.

The Prince called for Nachette in one motor-car and had another for the Herr Professor and Clarice, who took advantage of the ideal privacy to indulge in a protracted quarrel. There was a strong bond of mutual respect between them, which they constantly strengthened by seeking to find new faults in each other's character.

During the drive Nachette barely spoke, but when the palace was finally reached her usual confidence had returned, and she walked between the lines of liveried servants as though she herself were a visiting queen. She was looking her best: the rich color in her cheeks, her dark eyes and hair, and the easy grace of her carriage gave her a marked individuality; while the Prince, upon

whose arm she leaned, supplied the contrast necessary to enhance her Oriental beauty.

The great hall of the palace was filled with handsomely gowned ladies and men from all parts of the globe, most of them in brilliant uniforms and the remainder in the conventional black.

The first person upon whom her gaze rested was Jack, busily talking to the United States Minister, but she only bowed to him and proceeded to where their Majesties were sitting. Then came the formal presentation, and at last it was time for her to play before the King. She had expected to be frightened, but as she stood upon the platform and looked at the brilliant array, a strange calmness came upon her. Titles, and uniforms, and brilliant jewels—what did they all indicate? She had a realm of her own which only the chosen could ever enter. She had proposed playing a selection from Ventrilanno, but as she stood looking down upon them, she let her lids droop, and placing the bow softly upon the strings, she played from the group below as though each one were but a note in some mighty composition. Her half-closed eyes roamed here and there, and as a face stood out from its fellows she wove it into melody and played it.

There was not a sound from her listeners. Vainly they strove to identify even the school of music to which this wonderful symphony belonged. Suddenly, the warm, passionate face of the young Duke of Tergary caught her attention. She fixed her eyes upon him and the music grew tender and caressing, like the far-away songs on the moonlit canals of Venice. Then it waxed stronger and more passionate, with deep, quick runs and amorous pleadings. It grew fiercer and fiercer, until it

swept into a storm which seemed to despoil for the cruel pleasure of destruction. And then with a final crash the tempest died away, and the violin sobbed soft and low as a woman sobs for the thing which might have been. When she stopped playing a great sigh of relief went up from her audience, and then they burst into a rapture of applause. Each one had his own interpretation, and no two of them were alike, for a bell can only give forth one sound when struck, and a life can only give out that which it has taken in. When she raised her eyes the Duke of Tergary was not to be seen.

Again she played, but this time confined herself to at least a skeleton of written music. The violin which Professor Brahmfelder had given her was indeed a wonderful instrument, and she had found its every limitation. It possessed the rare quality of not appearing loud to those near by, but carrying full and clear to the most distant corner of the largest room. She had developed her long, tapering fingers until she thought through them. There was no perceptible effort in any part of her technique. She confined herself totally to feeling the music, leaving the execution to mechanical faculties which required as little will power as the beating of her heart.

As she played she swayed gently to and fro, her hair gradually working loose and rippling about cheek and brow, her eyes half closed, and an expression upon her face mysterious and inscrutable as the doom of unchangeable fate.

And as her physical eyes closed she became ethereal as a spirit. She wandered through strange scenes, and what she saw she told through the violin. Colors became tones, emotions became

tones, perfumes, deserts, mountains, all things became simply the chords in a vast harmony. The material things in the entire universe were merely signs and symbols of music—the one reality; and as she added tone to tone as the artist lays his color, there was a solid unity to it all—not the unity of monotonous repetition, but a grander effect, like the sublime chorus of a great city when heard from the proper distance. She was well aware that few ears could follow her most wayward flights, and endeavored to keep herself within reach of her auditors, so that in choosing a piece of written music and simply allowing herself occasional improvisations, she took them by the hand as it were and walked with them along the level plain, merely pointing out the mountains and the ravines, without asking them to scale the one or descend the other.

When she had finished the Queen called her to her side and they talked about music. The Queen herself was no mean musician, but she asked questions like a little child, and unconsciously Nachette answered with the grave indulgence of a teacher.

"Do you play no other instrument?" asked the Queen after they had conversed for some little time.

"Oh, after a fashion, I play every instrument. If an object has a tone, I know what the tone is; or if it has many tones, I know them each by name and what their relation is and whether or not they are fond of one another—all, all there is to know about them, I know, but I cannot think music through any instrument except the violin. You remember, perhaps, when you were learning to play, the movement would seem to leave your mind

perfectly formed, but when it came to your hands there was always a break before it finally reached the instrument. With my violin there is no break. I no longer know what my hands do. I give all my attention to collecting the tones, grouping and arranging them, and when I have designed the bouquet I send the design to my hands, leaving it to them to place the selected flowers in proper position. You know what I mean."

"I am afraid not through any experience of my own," answered the Queen with a smile. "There is still a sad break between my hands and the instrument. But I should think that you would like to lead a full orchestra so that you could get broader effects?"

"Ah, that is what I long to do—that is what I shall one day accomplish. But there shall be nothing but violins in my orchestra—violins or perfect voices. No other instruments can talk, you know. The violin tells with its sympathetic voice so many, many things that one never knew were true before. I love to take mine when the twilight falls and just let it play as it will, and it tells me the strangest things. There is much sadness in the world, but sadness causes the soul to blossom as the dew opens the flowers. I used to be afraid of the dark—when I was a little girl—and as soon as it was day I would get my violin to tell me of the horrid monsters who hid in the dark. One time while I was sitting alone in the dark, I grew frightened and took my violin and just let it play as it would, and it told me the truth, and now I am never afraid of the dark any more—when I have my violin."

The Queen sat silent for a few minutes looking at the girl, and then she said, with smiling half-seri

ousness, "And what did it tell? I too am afraid of the dark at times."

"It told me that the darkness which follows each day is to show that death is not to be feared, for the day always comes again, as a new life will follow this one when we are tired, and weary, and anxious only for rest. It told me that no other animal but man was ever afraid of the dark—even a little kitten or a bird does not fear it—and that when all men treated each other honestly, they too would welcome the darkness, because—well, because night, you know, is the season of love." Nachette paused in slight confusion, and a rich blush mantled her cheek.

"And where did my little girl learn this?" asked the Queen, taking the oval of the girl's chin in her hand and looking into her eyes.

"Why, this is what my violin told me," answered Nachette, returning her gaze steadily, but unable to prevent the blush from growing.

"I am afraid the violin did not tell you every single bit you know about love; but never be ashamed of honest love, dearie, it is the greatest blessing in life. I wish that you would ask your violin to tell me about the darkness too. Sometimes it seems very, very dark."

"The next time I play I shall try to have my violin tell it again and see what you can gather for yourself."

"You are a very strange child: awhile ago I was speaking to you as though you were years the elder, then I spoke as though you were a little girl, and now we seem to be exchanging confidences as though we were youthful companions. But the majordomo has signaled that the refreshments are

ready. Where is your Prince, that he may escort you?"

"Oh, he is not my Prince!"

The Queen laughed heartily at the accent upon the pronouns and replied: "At least you are unsophisticated enough to be a welcome change from most of the young ladies I am permitted to meet."

At this moment the Duke of Tergary drew near and saluted the Queen. "May I not escort our guest to supper, my royal aunt?"

The Queen looked at him a trifle coldly, but she replied with easy composure: "I should think that the Lady Isabella would expect you to escort her."

"I have just left her, and she is going in upon the arm of the Prince Alexander of Russia."

"Well, then, you may take the Lady Nachette, but remember that you are to treat her as though she were a little child; I should hate to see her charm dimmed by a veneer of conventionality."

And so Nachette went out to the great banquet-hall upon the arm of the Duke of Tergary, and the Duke of Tergary promptly forgot the admonition of his royal aunt, and proceeded to whisper burning compliments into her unaccustomed ear, to her own embarrassment and also to the chagrin of the Prince and the Lady Isabella, who sat opposite them and a little farther down.

All through the supper the Duke continued his pleasant task of making love to a beautiful girl, whose very inexperience in such matters rendered her all the more enticing. The Queen had taken due notice, and as soon as the feast was ended she hastened to ask Nachette to play for them once more.

And Nachette played all the more willingly because she was a trifle timorous before the warm gaze of the Duke. She played first the medley of Italian folk-songs, and the Queen was carried away by their enchanting melody, and sent her a magnificent diamond. And then Nachette smiled confidingly into the face of her royal hostess and played a strange selection which only they two understood. It came from the depths of shrinking despair, soared upward to the strains of religious ecstasy, and then slowly fluttered downward to warm, tender love. The quick tears sprang to the eyes of the Queen, and at its close she called Nachette to her side, thanked her again and again, and dismissed her with a kiss upon the brow.

As the assemblage started to break up, the Prince forced his way to Nachette's side. There was something in his manner which she had never seen before. "And so you have decided to flirt with the Duke of Tergary?" he asked with an insulting taunt in his tone.

"I have decided not to flirt with anybody," answered Nachette, surprised and hurt; "but if I wished to flirt with the Duke of Tergary or with anyone else, I should neither consult you nor permit you to question my right."

The Prince drew back a pace and stared at her. This was indeed a new Nachette; there was a confident dignity in her voice which charmed as well as stung him, and as he noted the queenly poise of her head and neck, he drew a quick inward breath, and changing his tone to one of friendly gentleness, he said: "Nachette, I must have a moment's speech with you. Will you please step into this little room a moment?"

The little room opened from the main hall and at its farther side was an alcove. They entered, and immediately the Prince took her hands in his and said in a voice which trembled with passion: "Nachette, I love you, I love you! Will you not marry me to-night? And we will go far away from everyone else—go to some secluded spot and live only for each other and for love. When you want to come back to the world, I can open every door to you. You do not have to play for money, I have great wealth and it is all for you. You may choose an orchestra of artists if you will and lead them; you can play just when you like and where you like—you do not have to struggle for fame. Just come with me, and, leading a full and rounded life, grow into the best that you may, as a flower grows, each minute a delight and not a doubt as to its future. Will you come, will you come, Nachette? Tell me that you will come."

The Prince himself was trembling. Nachette stood with her eyes glued upon his, half in terror, half with the natural sympathy which every woman feels for the man who loves her. She saw that there was none of the selfish lust in his eyes now which had burned there on that moonlit evening long ago—it seemed very long ago—when he had first asked her if she loved him. The hair on his forehead was damp and his brow beneath it was hot and feverish. Half mechanically, she reached out and brushed back the hair from his forehead, and at her touch he pressed his face forward and kissed the palm of her hand. Ah, how he did love her! There was no other woman upon the earth—no other man—no law of right or wrong, no day of reckoning—nothing—nothing but this sweet trop-

ical flower with its seductive perfume and its soft bloom still unmarred.

"No, Prince Alexander, as fond as I am of you and as much as I thank you for all the many kindnesses which you have shown me, I do not love you—and I never can love you."

"Do you love someone else? Answer at once."

The fierce ring to his voice startled her. "Why, ye—you have no right to ask."

The Prince paused, and his face gradually regained its usual supercilious expression. "And so the heat and the wine and your enchanting music have caused me to forget myself. Well, you will forgive me, because you know that I have only your best interests at heart. I suppose the Duke has turned your head?"

"Don't—don't talk of love any more."

At this moment the voice of the Professor was heard, and they stepped from the alcove. "Vy don't you keep your eye on her? Vat is it that you are fit for anyway? You come here to a king's palace and you a fine gown wear—twice I took you for a lady—and now you don't efen know where Nachette is."

"I left her here not five minutes ago. What is a manager good for? You never manage anything, you simply flutter and fuss about as though——"

"I am not a manager; and efen if I was, I couldn't manage that wild young thing—nobody could."

As the Prince and Nachette walked out of the room, the Professor and Clarice scowled at each other to hide their embarrassment, but the approach of Jack Braxton withdrew attention from them. Braxton shook hands cordially, and when he reached

Nachette, said: "You fairly outshone yourself to-night. Do you expect to stay some time in Rome?"

"Oh, we shall be here a week, probably."

"I have to return to Paris to-night. I received a telegram a few minutes ago saying that some of my affairs were tangled, and it will be all that I can do to make my train."

"I should like to place one of my cars at your disposal. How would it do for Nachette to return with the Professor and Clarice, and for me to drive you to the station?"

"That's mighty kind, Prince. Only one plan would suit me better, and that would be to have Nachette drive me there; but she would be apt to muss her gown with three in the brougham, and otherwise she would have to return alone."

"That would not matter. My chauffeur has been in my employ all his life; he is absolutely trustworthy."

"All right, if Nachette will consent. I have several things I wish to talk over with you," he added, turning to her.

"Well, then, hurry along or you will miss your train," replied the Prince good-humoredly, and Nachette thanked him with her eyes. She perfectly understood that he was trying to atone, and she wished him to know that she had forgiven him. But Clarice did not thank him with her eyes. She stood silently awaiting the decision, and when it was finished she helped Nachette with her wraps, but her moody expression would have attracted attention had it not been for the hurry attending Jack's departure.

The two broughams were standing at the door. They were exactly alike, and the Prince helped Na-

chette into the first one. "You will allow me your violin to take?" asked the Professor.

"No, indeed," answered Nachette, "it will be my only company coming back."

The Prince slammed the door and said to the chauffeur, a large man with grave features, "Now then, Garth, make a quick trip of it. I think that I shall ride outside," he resumed, as the motor-car rolled swiftly away. "I wish to smoke, and it will give you more room. You two generally need all that is available."

It was not far to the hotel, and Prince Alexander went in with them and sat idly scanning a paper while he smoked cigarette after cigarette. As the minutes flew by, Clarice began to become alarmed and finally induced the Professor to telephone. There had been some delay in starting, but the train had just left.

"I knew something was wrong. I hope nothing else is going to happen, but I certainly do feel uneasy."

In a short time the brougham arrived, and Garth sent up word to inquire if the Prince were ready to go to his own hotel. The Prince gave orders to wait, as he wished to have a little talk with Nachette. After several minutes had passed, and Nachette did not put in an appearance, the Prince telephoned down and asked where she was. Garth answered that she had gotten on the train with Mr. Braxton.

When Clarice heard this, she turned ashy pale and stood in the center of the room with her eyes starting. As a rule, she was a woman of fine appearance, who gave evidence of having been extremely handsome in her youth, but as she stood there she seemed like a savage. Her lips were

curled back over her teeth and murder shone from her eyes. As the Prince looked at her a slight shiver passed over him.

"God!" she exclaimed at last. "He has taken her away—and I—I was fool enough to stand by and let him. Fool—fool—fool! And you"—she whirled upon the Prince—"you who always take it upon yourself to decide every question—do you see what you have done?"

"I—I can't believe it is an elopement, Clarice. Braxton is a steady young fellow. It must be some sudden whim of the girl's. She may have just run up to——"

"Stop! I am not a child. I know the whole story as though I had been with them in the car. He drew her a wonderful picture of love, he promised all things, he touched her heart—her simple child's heart; and now—oh, I shall kill him!"

"Well, even if they have eloped, he will probably marry her. Braxton is of good family and has a liberal income——"

"Do not tell me a single thing about either his family or his income. Neither one matters. Oh, my poor little girl! Have I watched you from the day of your birth, have I known every call that was in your blood, and have I let you ruin your life? Fool, fool, fool!"

Professor Brahmfelder was completely beside himself. He fluttered up and down the room, wringing his hands, or paused to look from one to the other with a doglike inquiry on his face. "Yes, but now—now! What is it to do now? Is there not a police force oder a telegraph oder something what we could into use put? Why is it that you cannot in your swiftly flying motor-car overtake them?"

Clarice jumped for the telephone, but the Prince roughly took the receiver from her, told exchange that it was a mistake, and then he faced her.

"We must not be too hasty. If it is not an elopement, we do not wish her name headlined in every paper about the globe. I know a private detective agency in Paris and shall send word in cipher to have them intercepted. The best plan will be for you and the Professor to pack at once and leave for Paris on the next train. I shall find out what I can at the station and shall join you as soon as possible."

"You are right, you are right," answered Clarice with a dry sob. It was a relief to have something tangible to do, and she started packing at once, while the Professor toddled off to his room to throw together his meager belongings.

"Have you sufficient funds?" asked the Prince.

"Yes. Oh, yes, she always let me take care of the money. Money—we have more money now than we have ever had, but what good is it—what good is it? Oh, Prince Alexander, you will do all you can to save her from him, won't you?"

There were generous tears in the eyes of the Prince. "I will," he said, and hastily left the room.

In a few moments the Professor entered with a pair of trousers over his arm and a well-worn shoe in his hand. "What do you think?" he asked in tones of horror.

Clarice sprang to her feet. "Oh, what is it—what is it? Have you found anything?"

"She has her violin with her taken," answered the Professor, holding up the index finger of his free hand impressively.

"Violin! Oh, are you an absolute idiot? Is this a time to speak of violins? Go away—go at once! Violins! Oh, my poor little honey-bird!"

The Professor stood shaking his head solemnly: "I never would have thought she could have done it—and with her violin right there too."

CHAPTER IX

THE Prince was at the early morning train to make arrangements for the journey. He was very gentle with Clarice, endeavoring to cheer her up by many thoughtful little courtesies, but there was an unspeakable despair in her dry, red-lidded eyes, which refused to be dispelled. He told them he had information that a heavily veiled lady who answered Nachette's description had taken the same train with Jack but had entered a different coach, and this was the best word he could offer them. He also said that there did not appear to be much for him to learn in Rome and that he should probably leave for Paris on the next train. Then with a final caution to be careful not to do anything hasty, he bade them farewell and they left on their sad journey.

And it was a sad journey. Clarice sat grim and silent, while the Professor, who tried his best to be brave and hopeful, would ever and anon be forced to hastily turn and glance out of the window, while his lips would tremble and his eyes fill with tears. Like taunting phantoms the scenes of the past few months flitted through his brain. He saw her first failure and her ultimate triumph; he saw the sure and true development of her strong, artistic soul; he saw the dramatic scene wherein the great violinist had publicly abdicated and the queenly

way in which she had carried the situation; and through it all he saw that he himself, sharing in her triumphs, had come once more into the very vortex of the musical world long after his old associates had left the center of the stage, and the blow was most bitter.

But there was even a deeper sting to the poisoned shaft: he had loved Nachette as his very daughter. His own heart, kept innocent and childlike throughout all his simple life, reveled in the purity and sweet ingenious temperament of the girl—the girl who in her broad, deep personality combined the admiring enthusiasm of youth with the absolute conception and the mature execution of the art to which he had devoted his life. The life of the little Professor had had more than its proper share of pathos. His very appearance had worked against him. Repeatedly he had proved his ability, but always his inferiors treated him with a patronizing condescension which completely stamped out all semblance of dignity. His queer little face beneath his massive brow gave him a peculiarly comical appearance, so that even now in his woe he aroused amusement rather than sympathy in those who noticed him.

He had always liked Jack in the abstract, but he well knew the extreme difficulty of a woman trying to be a good wife and a great artist. His long experience had shown him that it was well-nigh impossible, and he felt that if Jack had done the manly thing and had formally asked the hand of Nachette in marriage, he could have convinced him that it would be best for both of them to part, to never meet again even as friends, at least until time had more firmly fixed their characters. But

to elope with her, to smirch the dawn of her career with a scandal, to take advantage of her youth and inexperience—this aroused all his righteous wrath, and his hand occasionally clenched as he thought of the base treachery of it.

When they arrived in Paris they drove at once to their old apartment, and as soon as he had arranged his baggage the Professor drove to Jack's club. He was surprised to find that young gentleman in the breakfast-room reading some bulky documents. The Professor stood in the doorway, his small eyes blinking rapidly behind his heavily rimmed spectacles. Surely this man must be a hardened criminal! He walked slowly over to where Braxton was sitting and touched him upon the shoulder. Braxton turned, stared at him a moment, and then exclaimed, "Why, Professor, what is the matter? Why are you here?"

The Professor looked into the young man's eyes with a glance which was not angry, but only very, very sorrowful. "Where is she?" he asked.

"Where is she?" repeated Braxton, while his face went pale. "Why do you ask me such a question? Don't you know where she is? Tell me at once what the trouble is!"

"Oh, my dear young man," said the Professor brokenly, "do not keep me in suspense—tell me where she is. It was a great mistake, but it was not her fault—and you, you are only a child also—tell me where she is. Let us talk it over, let us——"

"Stop this nonsense! Something has happened to her—I know absolutely nothing of it—speak!" Braxton had risen and had grasped the Professor's shoulder. As the Professor simply stood and gazed helplessly at him, he continued: "Where is Clarice?

Where is the Prince? Why can't you answer and tell me at once?"

"Oh, I am at sea all—you do not guilty appear! Clarice, she iss here—you must not by her be seen. She would murder commit. I do not——"

"Where is Clarice? If you are too dumb to answer she will not be."

"She is at the old apartments; but you must not without Nachette go there, oder Clarice, she will not ask of you questions, she will simply kill you."

Braxton stared into the face of the Professor as though he feared the old man's brain had weakened. Finally he placed his hand gently upon the shoulder of his trembling guest and said quietly: "Come now, Professor, tell me just where you saw her last, and what has happened."

The old man sank upon a chair and said: "I hardly know whether I yet live. I saw her last getting in the motor-car with you—and with her violin. Ah, I don't see how she could have done it! Then we found out that she had on the train with you to Paris gone. That is all we know. Will you not take on us pity and tell us where she may be found?"

Braxton stood with lips set and teeth clenched, but he made no sound. For a moment he stood thus, and then, glancing around the room, he said in a low voice: "Come, we are attracting attention; let us go at once to Clarice."

He quickly gathered his papers together, signed his check, sent the papers to his room, and, followed by the old man, who walked like one in a trance, he called a cab and was whirled to the hotel. As they entered the apartment, Clarice darted at him, seized

him by the lapels of his coat, and demanded: "Where is she—where is my honey-bird? Oh, you have proved yourself a serpent! Tell me where she is—tell me where she is—tell me where she is!"

The woman's voice rose to a shriek, but Braxton only stood looking steadily into her eyes. His face was deadly pale, with only a small hectic spot on each cheek, but he did not flinch, even when she shook him in the paroxysm of her wrath. Presently he answered, and the clear, low voice caused her to relinquish her hold and to stand with limp arms hanging at her side and eyes gazing helplessly into his. "I do not know where she is. I saw her start away in the brougham before I even got my ticket. She had told me in Paris that we could not think of marriage for some time, and—I am a man of my word—I promised not to worry her with useless pleading but to await her own good time. Dismiss all thought of me and let us take counsel together. Where is the Prince?"

"He will be here some time to-day. He stayed to ascertain whether or not there was any clue in Rome."

"There are still many bandits in and about Rome—she may have been taken for a ransom; but what of the brougham? Did the Prince find out what had become of it?"

Clarice darted a quick, suspicious look at him. "Yes, that was our first news. The driver said that *she had entered the station with you*—heavily veiled."

"And the Prince is to arrive to-day—I see it all; he himself is at the bottom of this. But you say that the chauffeur returned to your hotel and that the Prince was still there. I remember now that a veiled woman did enter with me, but took an-

other coach; and the chauffeur did not look behind when I alighted, but—but it would have been impossible for her to have been taken from the car without his knowledge, and he had started before I entered the station. Oh, I must see the Prince at once! Even if he be innocent, Rome and not Paris is where the search must be made. I am on intimate terms with the United States Minister at Rome. I wish I knew whether the Prince——"

The rude jingling of the telephone caused them all to start. The call came from the Prince, who was at the club. Clarice answered the call. "He was here this morning with some papers, but left hurriedly with an oddly dressed man who appeared very much excited. From the description I should judge him to have been an accomplice, probably some low thug. I shall seek to find him at once."

The voice came clearly through the receiver and was plainly heard by all three. "Nonsense!" said Jack. "The man with whom I left was the Professor."

"What, me? Mein Gott, do I look like an accomplice—a low thug? Why, it is an outrageousness! I——"

Jack placed his hand over the mouth of the excited little man and took the receiver from Clarice. "This is Braxton at the phone, and he is most anxious to see you at once. Will you come here or shall I come there?"

The Prince seemed much surprised; he cleared his throat twice before answering, and then said, "I think perhaps you had better come here."

"On second thought, I insist that you come here," replied Jack sternly. "You do not seem to be at your best to-day, or you would have recog-

nized the advantage of holding our first meeting in the presence of those most interested. Kindly make haste." Jack hung up the receiver with a bang and flung himself into a chair.

The Professor fidgeted for a moment, and then left the room. Jack sat with brows drawn together and his eyes on the carpet. Clarice stood and watched him, while the small clock on the mantel ticked out the seconds with solemn regularity. Suddenly she crossed to him and said: "Mr. Jack, I can hardly believe it was you; but who else could it have been? You act as if you were telling the truth, but—oh, I wish I knew! If you know where she is, tell me—for God's sake, tell me."

He sat with his eyes on the carpet for a moment longer, and then stood up and said solemnly: "I hope and pray that I may suffer the torments of hell throughout eternity if I know anything regarding the disappearance of—of Nachette."

At the name his face twisted into an expression of anguish, and the woman's eyes filled with tears as she hastily left the room. She stood in the doorway a second and looked back at him. He was gazing out of the window, and she entered her own room and took from her bosom a small revolver. She held it in her hand a moment and then put it into the top drawer of her dresser.

Both she and the Professor returned to the room before the Prince entered, and when he did come he found them standing in a small half-circle to receive him. He glanced from one to the other, and when at last his gaze met that of Braxton the two men faced each other with a stern, set look. Jack was the first to speak. "What was the result of your investigation?"

"All I could learn was that she had entered the same train with you. I do not like to say this, and I make no accusation, but that is the truth of the matter."

"And where did she leave the train?"

"I did not seek to discover."

"That should certainly have been your next step. What course did your chauffeur take on his return to the hotel?"

"The question is immaterial; but I did not even put him to an examination. He took the most direct course, and, considering a punctured tire, arrived as quickly as could have been expected."

"Ah-ha! a punctured tire? Where did this happen, and what was the character of the neighborhood?"

"Well, it was in the middle of the block between Strata Emanuel and Via Salferno. It was a rather dark place, and it took him several minutes to repair the puncture; but what difference does this make?"

"It is possible for her to have been taken from the car there. I know that she did not leave the car at the station; I know she did start home in it. I am trying to find out where she left it. Is your discipline strict?"

"So strict that Garth himself saw his father—of course it is unnecessary to go into the details of my management. Suffice it to say that I have never had one of my own servants fail me for fifteen years."

"You started to mention Garth's father: has Garth a cause for revenge?"

"See here, Braxton, I am getting extremely weary of this. You seem to imagine yourself a prop-

erly constituted court. I have the utmost reliance in Garth."

"Still I infer that Garth's father was trusted once too often, and I dare to presume that it was fifteen years ago and that his earthly existence terminated at just about that period. I noticed the chauffeur's face last night. He is a man of strength, both of will and physique."

"All this I consider a waste of time; my servant is not open to suspicion."

"We may as well understand each other frankly. Your servant, and—every other person in Rome last night is open to suspicion, even as I was open to suspicion. I expect to give my entire power to this case, although it finds me in a most embarrassing position; but by to-morrow I shall know who the veiled lady was, and as much as possible of the return drive of your motor-car. Where is Garth now?"

"He is still in Rome. There may be some ground for your suspicion. I do not think that he would dare to lie to me; but neither would he dare to return and tell me that he had lost Na—his passenger, and it is conceivable that she could have been taken from the car while he was mending the puncture. It may be the best plan for me to return to Rome and make a closer investigation. Don't you think so? You could work here and we could communicate with each other by telegraph."

Braxton did not answer for a moment; a quiet, half-satirical smile spread across his face. "I prefer to work entirely alone. I am still under suspicion myself. I shall put my plans into operation at once, and I expect you to do the same."

A fierce scowl gathered upon the face of the

Prince, but he forced it away and said with insincere carelessness: "As you will. I cannot help but gather from the tenor of your remarks that you do not hold me above suspicion either. Well, as we are to act separately, I prefer to get to work as soon as possible."

He walked over to the window and glanced down into the garden. Braxton stood looking at him for a moment, and then he picked up his hat and walked to the door. At the threshold he turned to Clarice and said: "I shall keep you thoroughly informed as to my movements and also in regard to whatever clues I find. Good-afternoon."

As soon as he had left the room, the Prince turned and began to question concerning Jack's manner when he had first approached him. From the Professor's disjointed account it appeared that Jack had been wofully embarrassed. Before the Prince had questioned long he was convinced, and had convinced the Professor, that Jack's manner was exceedingly suspicious. Then with another offer of funds, which was refused, he left them, telling them that he would put every possible force at work and would inform them of the first results.

Clarice had stood without change of expression as Jack was promising to keep her in touch with each development, and she stood without change of expression as the Prince was declaring himself. She continued to stand with her face hard and cold after he had left the room; while the Professor, putting his hands behind his back, paced up and down the room like a mechanical doll, his steps shuffling wearily, and his face shrouded in gloom.

"That Jack—he must be a deep villain. I did not think that he guilty acted this morning. He

completely fooled me, but since I have heard the Brince his manner discuss, I see that he was simply throwing dust in my eyes. Oh, this world, it is of a vast wickedness!"

"All men are to be suspected until she is found, but you must not appear to suspect any man—do you hear? You must act as if you trusted each of them and draw them out. Watch every move, note every expression—oh, what am I talking of? All that you know of life is music—and now I want a man—a real man that I can trust. We must do something ourselves. Do you not know of a detective who can be trusted? Have you no friends whom you can question without telling too much? We must do something at once, or I shall go mad."

The Professor looked at her with a hurt look in his gentle eyes. "A man—a real man," he repeated without anger. "No, I am not a real man. I have lived quietly, surrounded by the sweet notes of melody. I—I have never for the vice and the wickedness of the world had a desire, and I know not how the signs of them to read, but—but what I can do, I most gladly shall with all my heart, and if it was my life which I could exchange for the happiness of my little lost girl, that would I freely give and with a great gladness!"

There was no reproach in his tones, only meek apology, and as he turned and walked slowly out of the room, Clarice ran and caught his hand. "I know that you would do anything in your power—I did not mean to hurt you, believe me, but I am all unstrung. We must find her—what can we do?"

"I am going down to the Opéra Comique, there I shall the manager see; I shall say to him: 'Sir, I am in great need of the services of a discreet de-

tective; can you perhaps tell me where such a one can be found? And if you refrain from asking why, I shall esteem it of you a great favor.' Is not this a good plan?"

"It is the very best I can think of, and if you ask just in that way, it will be the best for all. Now be sure and ask just as you have told it to me. See if you can word it the same way again."

With the quiet simplicity of a dutiful child the little man repeated the form of his request, and with a cheering pat upon the back Clarice sent him on his way—an odd, sweet, minor note in the great chorus of life. After he had left, she sat by the window and waited until the shadows grew long, the gloomy darkness crept silently in and filled the room, and the streaked bead of another day was strung upon the chain of time.

CHAPTER X

WHILE she sat there, a low knock at the door aroused her, and she hurriedly turned on the lights and opened the door. Jack entered the room quietly and said: "You are acquainted with the American Consul—I remember that you and Nachette called upon him in regard to your passports. He returned on the same train with me, and is down in the office now. I should like to make you believe that I am absolutely innocent; but I should rather prefer you not to show what your own belief is. Will you permit me to send for him?"

"It does not really matter. I can neither believe you absolutely guilty nor absolutely innocent. You act as though you were innocent—and I know your face, every line of it—but—yes, you may send for him."

Jack telephoned down and the consul soon came up. He was a large, kindly faced man, and as he put a hand upon Jack's shoulder after he had bowed to Clarice, he said good-humoredly: "And now what have you against my young friend that he insists that I come here and swear that he behaved himself upon the train last night? If you knew him as well as I do, you would know that he was a fairly trustworthy boy—an unusally trustworthy boy for his years."

"For his years, perhaps; but you are aware that this is a stringent qualification?"

The consul readjusted his glasses and looked at Clarice. Her dress while neat was plainly that of an upper servant, but her manner and intonation were those of a woman of the world. He looked at her intently while his mind tried to classify her, according to the custom, or rather the habit, of those who deal much in an official capacity with strangers.

"I must admit that at his age a boy needs careful handling; but seriously, I consider Jack Braxton a boy to rely upon."

"If it is just the same to you, I should prefer you to lay less emphasis upon the *boy*. I have had certain experiences lately which make me feel quite a little like a full-grown man." Jack spoke in a good-natured tone, but there was an undercurrent of dignity in it which caused the consul to give him a searching glance.

"By Jove, my boy, I believe it! Still there is the same span of years between us as there always was, and you must excuse me if I overlook it occasionally. Now then, as to my present mission, I met you at the station in Rome. You were alone, we came all the way in the same coach, and I did not see you speak to any one else. When we arrived at Paris, I picked you up in my carriage and dropped you at your club at nine this morning. Does that answer your question?"

The consul turned to Clarice, who had watched every motion of his face. "Yes, sir," she answered without hesitation. "It was not to satisfy me that Mr. Braxton brought you here, but to satisfy himself. Still, I am much obliged to you, and some day I may ask you for a favor myself."

"That is my life," answered the consul cheerily,

"granting or apologizing for not being able to grant favors; and now, as I have an appointment, you must excuse me."

After the consul had departed Jack said: "Clarice, the veiled woman who was supposed to get on the train with me left it at Nice. She was the daughter of the chief magistrate, and you may easily verify this. Nachette did not leave Rome until after I did—if she has left it even yet. I am going to return to Rome. Will you correspond with me?"

The woman had turned off all the lights but one. This shone full upon the face of the young man while she herself was in the shadow. After a slight interval she answered: "Yes. I want to see her again, I want to hear from her as soon as I can. You won't wait until you have proven the clues; you'll tell me as soon as you find them—you will, won't you?"

"I shall tell you whatever I am able to."

"Oh, you must! I am the only mother the poor little thing ever knew. You must tell me, you must!"

"How much can I dare to tell you? I shall be frank enough to say that I suspect the driver of the brougham. You have every confidence in the Prince—even now I have men searching for all they can learn about his past, especially about the father of this man Garth. If you were to tell the Prince of my plans, it might frustrate them."

"I remember what you said this afternoon—every man in Rome at that time is open to suspicion. You see how I am placed: I can do nothing myself—it will be maddening to just sit and wait for news—oh, it will be terrible! No, I shan't

reveal anything you tell me which would show your plans to the Prince; nor shall I tell you of his. That is the only fair way."

"That is the only fair way. And now, good-by, Clarice; keep as brave a heart as you can, and the instant there is any news I shall send it to you."

As Jack hurriedly drove to the small lodging-house where he had arranged temporary headquarters, he could not keep his mind from dwelling upon the peculiar woman he had just left. At times the humble servant, at times the woman of the world, occasionally using choice phrases, occasionally dropping into Southern idioms, always giving evidence of latent force, never allowing the stranger to pass the outer barriers of her reserve. He knew that she loved Nachette with her whole heart and that she had naught else in the world to love, and this made a peculiarly sympathetic bond between them; but before he reached the boarding-house his mind was engrossed by the task before him.

His baggage was already packed, and he sat in the small sitting-room of his apartment, smoking and planning. Shortly after ten one of his men returned with a report. He had discovered that the Prince was maintaining four different apartments in Paris, wherein he occasionally received women, and Jack gave orders to have a detective who understood Russian placed on each apartment.

After the man had left, Jack turned out his light and stood for some time at the open window watching the young moon, which was slowly sinking. He thought of all the different scenes upon which this gentle queen of the night was gazing and of all the different eyes which were lifted to her, and

as the thought struck him that perhaps somewhere his little lost sweetheart was also watching the selfsame moon upon which his own eyes had at first idly rested, a little ray of comfort crept into his heart and warmed it. He remained in his apartment until it was time for him to catch his train, and then, as no other reports were brought, he drove to the depot and was soon en route for Rome.

When the Professor returned to the hotel he found Clarice sitting by the window overlooking the garden. He came bustling in and turned on the lights. His face was shining with self-satisfaction and he rubbed his hands complacently as he marched up and down the room. Clarice waited for a few moments, but as he did not speak, she said, "Well, what wonderful feat have you accomplished to give you such an air of importance?"

"Ah, you will soon see how you have me underestimated. Now is the time when I know that I have friends who will not forget me. When all the skies are blue and efery day one's ships come sailing home, then friends are all the people one meets; but when a storm gathers, then—then it is——"

"I know; but what have you done—tell me what you have done."

"I went to the manager, I spoke word for word my message as I had it rehearsed. 'So?' he said. 'Yes,' answered I. And then he said: 'I can for sure give to you a reliable detective, who is not a reality detective—which all the better is, because he will not by criminals nor even by other regular detectives, who are much the same thing, be known, and moreover, he is a worthy man—a musician, an actor—who is in much need of money. He it is who can by you be trusted.'"

"Did you see this man?"

"I did of course see him. For long years I haf known him, although he is not of a great age. I told him if he was faithful, great would his reward be; that if he was unfaithful, I should kill him; and he said that was fair enough. I told him that I would pay to him fifty francs a week as long as he worked, and one thousand francs if he found—if he found her."

"One thousand francs is not enough—make it five, ten, fifty thousand francs."

"No, not so; one thousand francs to this man looks bigger as a hundred thousand francs to even me—he is of a vast poorness. He lost one eye, his voice is hoarse, and his leg also is lamed from an accident. He got from this accident much damage-money; from the damage-money he got the absinthe-habit; from the absinthe-habit he got poverty; and from poverty, he of the absinthe-habit was cured—now he is the very man for us."

"What did you tell him to do first?"

"I to him gave a hundred francs and told him to get some good clothes and food and then on the morrow to come here to the hotel and we would together talk it ofer. And now haf you your dinner had?"

"No, oh no, I can't eat; but you must eat to keep your strength up."

"And not only me, but also you. Do you think that she would like to haf you spend all your time in mournfulness and get weak and useless, or would she sooner haf you keep up a brafe heart and a strong body, so that when the message comes you will be ready to do what there is which must be done?"

There was a new undercurrent of assurance to the Professor's voice, and after a moment Clarice arose and ordered their dinner served in her parlor. The Professor added a bottle of wine, and during the meal exerted every effort to keep the conversation light, and foreign to the subject which weighed like lead upon both their hearts. Clarice appreciated his endeavors and ate and talked as best she could, but in spite of them both, occasional lapses would come when silence would fall between them and their tear-dimmed eyes would gaze unseeing toward the vacant chair.

After one of these silences, the Professor looked up and said to Clarice: "And yet, after all, I cannot tell what it is the detective must first do. I cannot think where he should go nor whom he should watch. The Brince and this young Braxton, and the coachman—their stories are not all of an agreement. They cannot all be true. The young boy he has the look of truth in his eye; the eye of the Brince, it is a bat eye; and the coachman, he has the look of a bear. He says not much and he wears a smooth smile upon his face; but even so does a bear, and never does a bear so sweet and innocent look as when he has just eaten something. If we knew all that the coachman knows—but that is of an impossibility! Have you no plan?"

"Jack Braxton does seem honest, but he also seemed honest the night he and—Nachette went to the park, and yet he made love to her. Oh, I am afraid that that was the start! I cannot trust him, I cannot trust him!"

"Well, I am of a great age and I have known many men. If we trust not the young men who would make love to a girl in a park, we have left

few young men to trust; and moreover, these few are the meanest of all. Somedimes I almost vish that it had been this young Braxton who had taken her."

"No, oh no, no—I should rather see her dead!" Clarice had risen to her feet and stood with her hands clenched, but as she saw the look of horror upon the face of the Professor, she calmed herself, and continued: "Now, Professor, we must not trust anyone, but we must appear to doubt no one. The Prince has always been kind, and I am sure that he will do all he can to help us. Of course the coachman may have had something to do with it, but the more I think it over, the more I am sure that she was taken to hold for a ransom. To-morrow you must advertise in the papers of Paris and the papers of Rome."

"Oh no, not yet. To-day a reporter asked me about our plans for the next season. I told him we had no plans as yet—that we had the world to choose from and need not worry. Then he wanted to know where she would next appear, and I told him that I could not say, that she had gone to the country to rest and that no one could her address know or she might be disturbed. Oh, I could not bear to see her advertised!"

"You did the right thing. I did not mean to advertise her, but to advertise your present address and have a notice saying that she was in retirement. Then if she is being held for ransom, they will know where to send."

"That is a good idea; I shall early in the morning see that it is done. But what shall we do with our detective?"

"We shall send him to Rome. Does he know her by sight?"

"No, he has not for years at one time had enough money to purchase a ticket to a concert."

"Then when he comes to-morrow I shall show him her pictures, give him enough money for his expenses, promise him a suitable reward, and send him to Rome."

"Better it is that you gif him the expenses in small lots. He may get again the absinthe-habit."

"We must take the risk. In this world it is impossible to do anything without money."

"Well, now I am very sleepy," said the Professor, trying to yawn naturally. "I am at once going to retire, and do you also go to sleep, and remember that it is not us who must lie awake and worry. There is One who nefer sleeps, there is One who loves her more than we do, there is One who knows where she is to-night and who will take care of her, and comfort her, and do for her that which is best, both for this little short life and for that long beautiful life which will nefer end. Do not worry, but trust. Goot-night."

The queer little man left the room softly, but the simple sincerity of his words remained behind and kept repeating themselves soothingly to the sorrowful woman. Once more she turned out the lights and sat by the open window. There had been much of bitterness in her life; ofttimes she doubted the wisdom, sometimes the very existence, of Providence; but now in her absolute helplessness her heart climbed upon the simple ladder of words which the old man had left, climbed and laid itself broken and humble upon the threshold of heaven. She had been careful to instil the habits of religion into the mind of the child who had been intrusted to her, and she knew that whatever the

cause of her going away, either sorrow or repentance would be the companion of the inevitable loneliness which the hours of darkness would bring.

After a while she noticed the crescent moon slowly sinking into the quiet night. As she gazed up at it, it was so calm and serene that it seemed to stand as a symbol. Storms and war and sorrow might wrack the surface of the earth, but the moon which saw it all never varied, never lost its gentle beauty, but continued steadfast and true, to strengthen the faith of those below when the clouds had passed and they once more looked above.

After a time it seemed to Clarice that somewhere Nachette also was looking at that selfsame moon and thinking the selfsame thoughts, and the belief grew that no matter what distance might be separating their bodies, their souls must still be close together so long as their sight could focus upon the same beautiful Lady of the Night in her silver boat. The solemn largeness of these conceptions took her outside herself, and in the end Nature demanded her own. Weariness with its healing balm of sleep stole upon her, and after dropping to her knees and offering up a fervent prayer, she went to her own room and sought her rest.

But when once more the reality of their separation with its galling suspense came over her, she threw her arms wide and cried in the darkness, "Oh, my honey-bird, my honey-bird! The angels themselves left you to my care, and I don't know where you are, I don't know where you are!"

She buried her face in the pillows and the bed shook with her dry sobs, but after a time the tears came to relieve her, and after the tears came sleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE days which followed were lonely days for Clarice, but still there was much to be done. She kept a book, and as fast as the different reports came in, she entered them, compared them, and sought to draw a helpful conclusion. We are all detectives to a certain extent. From prehistoric times the subconscious memory retains much of the craft of the natural hunter; all our lives we are hiding secrets of our own, and striving to learn the secrets of others.

The Prince had remained in Paris, but had sent several of his men to Rome. He told Clarice that he had discovered that Jack was financially involved. Much of his holdings were in assessable stocks, and he had been forced to borrow heavily in order to meet a sudden emergency. Without stating it in so many words, he showed that this supplied an adequate motive. The earnings of Nachette would be phenomenal, and he might have taken this means to force her consent and gain control of her. His reports from Rome seemed to prove conclusively that she had left upon the same train as Jack.

On the other hand, Jack had sent reports giving her the name of every female passenger upon the train and their destinations. None answered the description of Nachette, with the single exception

of the veiled lady. He also told her that the car which had taken herself and the Professor to the hotel had left immediately after but had not since returned to its garage, and that the other car had left in the direction of Paris upon the day following. He asked her to try to find the whereabouts of the two cars.

She had sent her own detective to verify the list of passengers, which had been easily done; and then she was sure that Nachette had not left for Paris. Going carefully over the interview between Jack and the Prince, and bringing all the facial expressions before her, she at last decided that Nachette had been taken from the brougham either by trick or by force, and the servant of the Prince, having in mind the prompt punishment meted out to his father for a former breach of trust, had decided to attempt to shift the blame. But while this narrowed the field of her suspicions, it gave no pointed focus to her plans.

The Professor was of but little assistance. His knowledge of life seemed to have been drawn largely from operas, and it would have surprised him but little to discover that Nachette was disporting with the Rhine maidens or had left Rome in a boat drawn by a swan. But still his kind and willing heart was a great comfort, and as her life had been spent in helping rather than in being helped, he supplied the element most missed.

The detective whom he had procured had also failed to inspire her confidence in anything but his real and all too apparent need of money. He was a small man, prematurely aged. His bald head was large and well shaped, but his facial expression showed the effect of his misspent life, which his

single remaining eye served to emphasize. He had sat through the interview without making a single suggestion, but had readily agreed with all that either she or the Professor had ventured. Now, with a picture of Nachette and a plentiful supply of expense money, he was in Rome, and she was expecting a report from him at any moment. She had told him that more than anything else she desired the quick return of the missing girl. The guilt of her abduction could be dealt with later; or, if Nachette so desired, passed over altogether.

And now this embryo detective, who bore the appropriate name of Bertrand, was scouring Rome in search of the lost girl. He took himself seriously, and as he looked upon his sudden change of fortune as the dawn of a happier day, he was exerting every effort to find a clue. He had learned that the chauffeurs of the Prince had been in the habit of resorting to a certain wine-shop. Bertrand knew that there was but one way to achieve ready popularity in a strange wine-shop, so he proceeded to buy wine and treat the other sojourners, incidentally taking his own allowance. When midnight came he found himself unable to walk, and also devoid of funds.

This was an unexpected crisis, and he scarcely knew what to do, but being a detective is apt to sharpen one's wits, and after thinking the matter over he decided to telegraph. As he tried to leave the wine-shop, two of the men who had been availing themselves of his liberality arose, and each taking an arm, gave him the assistance necessary to locomotion. He had not taken a great amount of wine, but being for so long unaccustomed to it, and

also being sadly run down, it had had a powerful effect upon him. The fresh air revived him, however, and he soon noticed that his friends were searching through his pockets.

He did not resent this in the least, and after a few moments he paused and said in broken Italian: "Wait, let me stand still; you are more sober than I am. I could not find any money, perhaps you may, and then we shall return and enjoy some more wine."

The men looked threateningly into his eye, but it was perfectly single in every sense of the word. This was a new situation; they would have had no compunction in robbing him and then in knocking him on the head, but to have a man offer to share what they might find in his clothes was an occurrence novel enough to arouse their interest.

"What is your business?" asked one of the men.

Bertrand thought rapidly. "I am what they call a lawyer of the poor. When I find that a man has been left a little money, I hunt him up and tell him how he may get it without being cheated by the sharks."

"And were you searching for some one to-day?"

"Alas, yes; but I must not tell, you might divulge."

"No, you have treated us right; but we thought from the way you spent your money you must have an unlimited quantity of it. For whom do you search?"

"Well, I am looking for the larger of the two chauffeurs who drive for the Russian Prince. They used to spend their leisure at the wine-shop; but if the Prince were to hear of the message which I have for him, or the other one were to hear either,

then would it go hard with the man for whom I am searching."

"You need not fear us; we, too, are poor men and believe that all the poor should hang together. But you will not find him here. On last Friday night he was stopped upon his way from the station. We saw it, and a woman was taken from his motor-car into another. This other one looked like the other car of the Prince, but he who drove it was not in his employ. The strange motor-car drove rapidly away, and the chauffeur stood for a moment looking after it, and then with his knife he cut a puncture in his tire, repaired it and hurried to the hotel. Next morning he and his fellow came to the wine-room and drank together and then left, taking several bottles of wine with them. They have not since been seen, and the Prince has given up his apartment at the Hotel Ricardo."

"Well, friends," answered Bertrand, who was now perfectly sober, "I thank you, and you may rest assured that if opportunity present itself, I shall not forget you. Au revoir."

After leaving them, he walked slowly along until he made sure that they had not followed him, and then he hastened to the nearest telegraph office with his heart beating high. He had a report to submit—what more had any *bona fide* detective had? And his report was much better than any of theirs; in fact it was a clue. With feverish hands he wrote out his telegram, and handed it to the operator with new confidence. It was long, and at first the operator did not wish to send it collect; but several other telegrams had gone to the same address that day, and an item at the bottom implied that it would have to be sent that way or

none. This phrase was: "Forward two hundred francs at once."

Bertrand hurried around to his lodgings, ordered a fine supper with a bottle of wine sent to his room, and so excited and pleased with himself was he that he spent the night in solitary merriment, which, when one takes into account the vast but imaginary crowds of admiring citizens who turned out to welcome him as he escorted Nachette back to Paris, was not altogether without its social element. He looked far into the future and saw himself in many different capacities, but always in the train, and also incidentally in the pay, of Nachette. He put his hand in his pocket to find the photograph, but it was gone. "Ah, well, it is a small loss—her face is engraved upon my memory. This has been a busy day and not without profit." After which he placed his head upon his arms and slept beside the fragments of his feast.

He was awakened next morning by a complimentary telegram and the accompanying money. After taking a cold bath and freshening up his toilet, he sallied jauntily forth to add fresh laurels to his wreath. But alas! although he tried several different wine-rooms, they failed to be as generous as the one which he had patronized the preceding evening, and as nightfall approached he returned to the one which had properly reciprocated his efforts.

He found his two cronies of yesterday, and taking them to a secluded table ordered wine and food. In this genial atmosphere he endeavored without avail to garner some fresh clues. Failing in this, he said: "And again, I have a message for a beautiful dark-skinned girl. She is about twenty, her

eyes and hair are dark, and also she plays a little upon the violin. Can you tell me aught of her?"

"Oh, it will be easy to find such a girl here in Rome—we have many such; but won't it be all right if she plays the mandolin or tambourine instead of the violin? It would be easier to find her, you know."

"But you do not understand. It is not simply a girl answering this description that I want, but one certain girl. To find a girl to merely answer the description would be as easy in Rome as to find a cat in Paris."

"Well, but our time is valuable," suggested the other man. "If we search for this girl—and remember, we know Rome as you know your own pocket—we shall be put to considerable expense."

Bertrand smiled in perfect good-fellowship. "If you know Rome as well as *you* know my own pocket, you can be of much assistance to me. But I am only a poor man myself. For how little can you afford to devote yourself to finding this girl and to finding the chauffeur of the Prince?"

The men thought a moment and then answered. The sum amounted to thirty-five francs each a week. Bertrand drew a long face, and they haggled over the price for some time, but finally agreed upon it. Then Bertrand said that he would pay them half in advance and take up his headquarters in the wine-shop and that they should bring their reports as soon as anything developed.

"By the way," he added, "did you see the features of the woman who was taken from the Prince's motor-car and put into the strange one?"

"Of a truth, no," answered the larger of the two. "Her face was veiled, but her form we saw, and also that she carried in her hand a long case."

"That is the one—that is the girl you are to find. I am poor and she is now poor, but if you return her, I can promise a reward that will make you the envy of all your fellows. And now at once set about your search."

As soon as the men had left, Bertrand hastened once more to the telegraph office. It was surprising what a change had come over the man; the spell of ambition was upon him, and while it had not inspired him to great effort, it had thrilled him with great hope. His step was elastic, his face had taken on a haughty expression, and his walk was brisk and decisive. Taking the blank and pen importantly, he wrote another generous telegram, telling Clarice that he had taken the liberty of hiring the two men who had seen the change of cars made—they would be important as witnesses and also they thought they knew the destination from the direction taken. He regretted that he had been forced to pay the men seventy francs each, but felt that it was for the best. He wound up his report by stating that he supposed she would be glad to learn that Nachette had retained her violin, as it would comfort her and would also be of help in locating her.

Clarice was in a quandary over the complications. Neither the Prince nor Jack with all their facilities was able to send any definite news, while this haphazard selection of the childlike Professor had discovered a clue which held much promise. She promptly sent him another hundred francs, and then worried as to what she should do with the news which he had furnished.

Should she tell Jack or should she tell the Prince? If both were honest, both should know, and yet

she doubted both. The more she had studied the Prince, the less frank he appeared. He still insisted that Nachette had left upon the same train as Jack, and she inferred that his men in Rome were spending much of their time in shadowing Jack. Still he had based his reliance upon the report of his long-trusted servant, and if the Prince were honest he was doing the natural thing.

On the other hand, Jack had proven to her satisfaction that Nachette had not been on the same train, and then it had flashed across her mind that the car which had taken Nachette from that of the Prince might have been in Jack's employ. As she looked it over, it seemed somewhat singular that an innocent man should bring the consul to her room to prove that he had ridden alone from Rome to Paris; it had been too artistic a test to be above suspicion. It looked to her now that after making plans to see that the girl would be taken, he had also arranged a perfect alibi; but his boyish, honest face would stand before her, to be driven away in its turn by the thought that even then he might be with Nachette somewhere close to Rome. This theory seemed all the more probable from the fact that he had sent no definite report from Rome except such as would clear himself and point suspicion to the Prince.

She was not interested in his innocence; she wished to know the whereabouts of her absent charge, while he seemed to be absorbed in but two ideas, to appear innocent himself and to have the Prince appear to be guilty. In the end, she decided to hold her own counsel and trust to the efforts of her own detective, whom she had now grown to look upon as an instrument of fate. So

she determined to keep her information to herself and not divulge it until she had the two men before her. Then, she relied upon her own knowledge of humanity to select which, if either, was the guilty man. But she did go so far as to tell the Prince that she could not help but feel a suspicion of his man, and she tried to find out where he was and if the Prince had made any further investigation of him. The Prince had shown no change of feature at her question, but had replied in a careless way that he could find nothing in either the man's actions or appearance to lead him to believe that he had been false to him, and that he was then bringing the car to Paris, and upon his arrival she herself could cross-examine him if she wished.

Although Clarice could not avoid worry, there was at all times a feeling in her breast that the thing which caused Nachette the most suffering was their separation. She spent much time by the open window with her eyes half closed, or, if open, with a far-away look in them, and she seemed to hear the indistinct murmurings of the violin as though it were telling her that while lonely and sad, the child of her heart was undergoing no harsh treatment; and these vague, intangible expressions were so strong that they bordered upon telepathy and served to keep up both her health and her spirits. Had she only some soul stronger than her own to whom she could go for comfort and advice, it would have been a wonderful relief. In her stress she put more and more trust in Bertrand. Distance did indeed lend enchantment, and the pictures which her mind called up of the labors of himself and his two aides were very pleasing, but had little value to the school of realism.

CHAPTER XII

TO return to Bertrand and his able assistants: things did not progress as rapidly as they wished after their first real scoop. It was a source of untold joy to Bertrand to find that his efforts had been appreciated, and instead of his various assessments being discounted, the appropriations were generally larger than the levies. This had a tendency to stimulate the levies.

The worthy assistants too were enjoying a period of prosperity which was very close to their high-water mark; but when the first two days passed without their bringing in any fresh clues, Bertrand sat very straight and very stiff in his chair at the wine-shop and said that it was results that he wanted. He told them that if they were able to find the girl, he stood ready to show his appreciation in many ways, not the least of which would be the reward; but that if they were unable to achieve success, he would be forced to avail himself of more astute aides. Bertrand had once taken the part of the magistrate in "Billiewink," and the cast-iron expression which had been his interpretation of the part was very effective in the present case. He scowled fiercely and looked first at Luigi, the younger, and then at Beppo, the smaller, and more than ever were they convinced that they were dealing with one of the men whose delicate,

unseen touches have such far-reaching effects in shaping important events.

Morally, the two amateur assistants of the amateur detective were thorough ruffians; but while they had never hesitated at breaking laws from any inopportune twinges of conscience, they had always sinned in a mild, retail way. When it seemed profitable to them to knock a new acquaintance upon the head and relieve him of whatsoever cash he happened to possess, they did not hesitate; but from certain shrewd deductions which they had made, they had come to the conclusion that Bertrand was one of those who spent one year, or many, in setting up his pins and then knocking them down with a mighty crash.

Beppo was the leader—he it was who selected the men whom Luigi knocked upon the head, and Luigi had learned to always agree with Beppo without questioning where the agreement would lead or leave him. So after Bertrand had issued his ultimatum and had settled back in his chair, Luigi merely looked intensely wise as Beppo leaned forward and said: "Undoubtedly your honor has other agents beside our humble selves. Undoubtedly they are supplying your honor with what your honor wishes to know, and hence you have no further use for us; very well, we only wish to stay where we may be of service to him who pays us our meager wages. Are we to understand that your honor is tired of our services?"

"Myself, my affairs, and my other agents are matters which, if you are wise, you will leave entirely alone. You have become one of the small cogs in a large and dangerous machine. It sometimes happens that when the small cogs do not do

their work, they get crushed. When I am through with you, I shall let you know; before that, it will not be safe for you to leave my employ. I do not trust you—do you understand?"

Perfectly by accident, Bertrand had taken the one stand which would make the strongest impression upon his satellites. "We have not the slightest wish to leave the services of your honor, either now or hereafter, but neither do we wish to feel that your honor regards us merely as pensioners. When we said that we had no clues, we did not mean that we had not discovered news which may lead to a clue. We have followed many of these, and none has led to results, but this one may. To investigate, it will be necessary for us to leave Rome in the direction which the motor-car took. It will require expense money, for we may be gone three days; and it may result in naught, but we think there is a possibility of hearing both of the driver and of the girl who makes music upon the violin."

"It is the girl I want, the chauffeur is merely incidental. I don't know whether or not this is a wise move, but every effort must be made. If you think that this is your best plan, why go. I shall be here at this hour each evening, and if I get news before you return I shall leave you word where to meet me. How much will you require for expenses?"

Beppo took much time over this question—it might be his last opportunity at the elastic exchequer of his new master. Finally, he named a larger sum than any he had yet ventured. Bertrand looked at him a moment, and then, counting out half the amount, said drily: "It will not be necessary for you to purchase a motor-car in which to

make the journey, and this will amply cover all legitimate expenses for a much longer period."

The two men took the money and left the wine-shop, walking with a businesslike tread, while Bertrand took a book filled with queer marks from his pocket and studied it. Beppo paused at the window and watched him for some time. This book was the rock upon which many of his curiosity waves had dashed themselves in vain. He had neatly removed it from Bertrand's pocket one night and had studied it carefully, but when he found that it conveyed no meaning to him, he had slipped it back again and was more than ever convinced that Bertrand was a deep and crafty character. It is not strange that he could not read the queer hieroglyphics which the book contained. Bertrand who had made them could not read them either, but he did not wish his men to think that he spent his entire time sitting in the wine-shop waiting for them, so he had first filled the book and then pretended to study it, and it had its effect. One learns many things upon the stage, and one of them is a wide comprehension of the odd trivialities which attract and hold human interest.

"And where are we going?" asked Luigi.

"We are going to find Nachette," answered Beppo shortly.

"Where is she?" persisted Luigi with eager curiosity.

"Listen, Luigi: do you remember the night a month or so ago, when we found the man with the ring, asleep on the other side of the city? After we had bargained off the ring, we went to a wine-shop to drink in celebration; do you remember who it was who played in that wine-shop?"

"To be sure—it was a young, dark-faced girl."

"You speak the truth; and what did she play?"

"Upon the violin she played—I remember well."

"And her name—what was her name?"

"She had a strange name. I threw her a silver coin and said that if she would tell her name she should have its fellow, and that if she kissed me she should have the mates of both; but she would not kiss me."

"Yes, but she told you her name; what was it?"

"It was an odd name—never had I heard one like it; but when she refused to kiss me, I forgot all about her name and thought only of how sweet the kiss would have been. She was a pretty maid."

"A pest on her kisses! I have a faint recollection that the name was like the one we seek. Why do you not remember the name?"

"I seldom care much about the name of a girl; but if she had kissed me I should have remembered that."

"Yes, and no doubt you can remember what you ate that night!"

"I can indeed," answered Luigi, his face lighting, "and also what I drank. I had a rabbit-stew with garlic and——"

"Oh, do be still! What difference can it make what you had to eat? You are all brute. I wish you could learn to think and remember."

"All brute, hey? You heard the name as well as myself. Why do you not remember it?"

"I put a dozen things into my memory where you put one; is it odd that now and again a very small item gets misplaced?"

"That is a poor argument. One can fill a tin cup, and then he has room but for a few small nuts or

shells or candies upon the top; but one can fill a bushel measure and on the top he can pile melons and apples and pears and the contents of many tin cups. I do not feel to blame."

"Well, I refuse to argue with the wind or with the sea. Our journey to-night is to that same wine-shop to find the girl who played upon the violin."

"I wish that you would give me my share of the expense money now," said Luigi, after they had walked a while in silence. "If we find the girl, I should like to toss her some silver coins. It may be that she will kiss me to-night—I present a fair appearance with my new shoes and the bright handkerchief about my neck."

"See here, you"—Beppo turned upon his comrade fiercely—"if you do not obey me in all things to-night, I shall report you when I return to his honor."

"Oh, very well," grumbled the big man; "but I never agreed when I formed partners with you, or when we took service with his honor, that I would refuse to kiss a pretty girl whenever I got the chance."

Beppo did not deign to answer, and they hurried along the side streets, until after a long walk they arrived at their destination. A young man was playing a violin, and a girl with a tambourine danced and collected pennies. Beppo frowned when he saw them, but Luigi drank his wine in peace and happiness. "This girl has a pleasanter face than had the other; I will wager you a silver coin that she will kiss me."

Beppo did not answer, and Luigi had not expected that he would. He had made the remark in much the same spirit as a spoiled dog which has no

intention of biting will continue to growl when he feels that he is being unjustly treated. Beppo called a waiter to him, and giving him a small coin, asked carelessly, "And what has become of the girl who used to play upon the violin?"

"Oh, she left over a week ago. She was of too proud a spirit and would not exchange pleasantries with the customers."

"Indeed, I noticed that myself," said Luigi. "I gave her a silver coin and offered her three of its fellows for but a slight and customary favor, yet did she act as proud and haughty as though she had eaten from a silver dish in the palace of her grandsire. After that night I never came back."

"And where has she gone?" asked Beppo.

"That I cannot say. She had ever a smile upon her face, but it was a forced smile and her heart was not friendly. She told neither her lodging while she worked here nor her destination when she left."

"And yet withal she was a fair maid to look upon," said Luigi in a thoughtful aside.

"And what was her name?" continued Beppo.

"That too is a point on which I am not sure. When first she came and her name was asked, she said, 'You may call me Tito.' 'It is the name of a boy,' objected our head. 'Then like a boy I shall expect to be treated,' she had answered; and by my faith she acted like a boy."

"She was no boy," interrupted Luigi, "trust me for that. She was a girl all right. I should sooner toss my silver pieces into the sea than offer them for the kiss of a boy."

"Tito! That is not the name that I knew her by," persisted Beppo.

"Knew her!" exclaimed Luigi; but a well-directed kick upon the shin from the strong shoe of his indignant comrade occupied his attention, while the waiter answered: "Oh no; one evening a well-dressed man took a fancy to her and gave her some gold pieces and said that she must be Nachette, and she admitted that that was her name."

"Gold pieces? And did she exchange a kiss for the gold?"

"She did not; she simply smiled and went on with her playing."

"Ah, she is the clever one! I wonder if it is for a diamond she is holding out?" Luigi chuckled and then lapsed into a reverie as Beppo, who had been thinking rapidly, said, "Why did she leave?"

"A young fellow who came here much to drink wine fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. He persisted, and finally one night she told the head that she would come no more, and none of us have since heard of her."

"Waiter," said Luigi, striking the table with his huge fist, "she is a girl after my own heart. Fetch us more wine and bring yourself a bottle. It is no small privilege to know a girl like that, so one can drink a health to her. Not for silver nor for gold nor even for marriage—such a girl as that may yet become a duchess!"

While the waiter was after the wine, the tambourine-player drew nigh. Luigi held forth a small silver coin. "And would you tell me your name for this?" The girl smiled and nodded her head. "And would you give me a kiss for its fellow?" The girl beamed upon him and came to his side holding her lips invitingly. "Then shall I keep my money. I would sooner pay all the silver

I have for a diamond kiss, and not get it, than to be buried beneath a shower of copper kisses which any fellow may have for the trouble of picking."

As the girl drew away with a hurt look, Luigi laughed good-naturedly and tossed her the coins. "Sorrow not, little maid; the garlic has no thorns to protect it, yet were Italy a sad spot to dwell in if there were no garlic."

The girl threw him a puzzled smile and tripped away, while Luigi sat deep in his chair and gazed at the ceiling with a far-away look in his eyes.

"This is the girl we want," said Beppo suddenly.

"It's not the girl I want—I want the other one," answered Luigi, without lowering his eyes. "The more I think of her the more wonderful she seems. I once had a man who wrote rhymes tell me how it felt to be a poet. I fear I am about to become a poet—and this one was always upon the verge of starvation."

"And you also will be on the verge of starvation if you do not cease this senseless prattle. You are becoming a pest! I shall turn you adrift if you irritate me further. I mean that this other girl is the Nachette for whom we are searching. No common girl this, if I am any judge."

"Of a truth you have hit it," exclaimed Luigi excitedly. "I had for the time forgotten our mission. Common girl—I should say not! From my twelfth year I have been a favorite with the women, and many a strange tale could I tell of stately ladies who smiled into my eyes when they passed and who made the motion with their fingers when I looked back at them. Ah, I see depth to this plot! All the while I fancied that his honor could see a long way with that one wicked eye of his.

She may be a princess or anything you please. And I worried because she would not kiss me for a piece of silver. It is a joke!"

After they had drunk their wine they sallied forth, and Beppo led the way at a rapid pace. Luigi, as is the habit of large men, was accustomed to taking a leisurely gait, and after they had gone about a mile, he said: "I do not wish to interrupt your solemn silence, nor do I wish to make you waste any of the breath you need to continue this race; but I should like a small hint as to the goal."

"Where would she go when she left the wine-shop?" asked Beppo, and then continued: "She would, of course, go to the opposite side of the city to miss the man who bothered her. She was not familiar with the customers, hence she has but little money saved up; therefore she must at once enter upon new work, and we must seek a girl who plays the violin."

"No wonder it tires me to think. There is no need when I am with you, and I get all out of the practice of it. But now that I know the need, I shall hurry as much as you wish."

Luigi took a long, steady stride, which made the smaller Beppo exert every effort to keep up with him. They traversed the city, and it was long after midnight before Beppo called a halt and they entered the dark hall of a gloomy building. Walking to the far end of the hall, Beppo gave a peculiar knock, and after a time a surly old woman opened the door. They passed inside and Beppo said: "Mother, I wish to find a girl who plays the violin. Her name is Nachette; she plays in wine-shops, but she has not the ways of such girls. Do you know of her?"

"What will the pay be?" asked the old woman with a leer.

"I should hate to be the man to offer this one a coin for a kiss," muttered Luigi beneath his breath.

"I shall pay you well, you know me of old; now answer my question."

"No, I do not know of her to-night, but if she be in the district, I shall know of her to-morrow night. When you come, forget not the money."

The two men withdrew and sought their sleep. They slept until afternoon and then took a slow stroll among the various wine-shops of the neighborhood. They met with no success, and about eight in the evening called once more at the home of their new ally. She received them in silence, and after they had sat for a time looking at one another, she said, "First must my hand be crossed with silver—no, not that trifle—the biggest silver coin there is."

Beppo gave her the coin, and she thrust it into her bosom cackling. "I have not been able to find her yet, but now I shall hunt the better; come to-morrow evening."

Beppo knew her, and he withdrew with a smile which required much effort to keep good-humored. When they reached the street, he stood for a moment in indecision, and finally Luigi spread his hands and said, "Now then?"

"She is not in this neighborhood, I fear," answered Beppo thoughtfully. "I hardly know where to look next."

"What do you suppose he wants with her?" asked Luigi.

"I know no more of that than yourself. That is

not our concern. We want her for the reward, and mayhap he wants her for a larger one."

"If I thought he meant her harm, I should kill him before ever he had a chance," remarked Luigi in a tone of simple sincerity. "If he is after a reward only, perhaps he has never seen her himself. Could we not take around some other girl, get our reward and then go over to Venice for a time?"

Beppo thought for a moment, and then he said, "At least we shall find out whether or not he knows. Come."

They were not far from the shop where Bertrand was to meet them, and they started for it on a run. When within a block of it, Beppo paused and looked at his companion. "We are not hot enough," he said, "but sprinkle some dust on your face and we will take the chance."

They mussed their hair and mingled some of the dust of the street with their perspiration before continuing their way into the shop. Bertrand was seated at his table with his mysterious book in his hand. He looked up as they entered, noted their traveled appearance, and putting the book into his pocket, said, "Well?"

"We have found a clue, your honor, but the servant of the Prince is no longer with her, and we do not wish to make a mistake. Has she a scar upon her left cheek?"

"I don't think so—no, certainly not." In the pause between his first and last clause Bertrand had taken the time to decide that such an identification would have undoubtedly been mentioned; but his moment of indecision had revealed to the watchful Beppo that he was merely an agent, and after spending an hour in the mystifying report of his

imaginary clue, and in the consumption of various viands, Beppo withdrew, followed by the trustful Luigi.

"Well," said Luigi, after they had walked a while in silence, "what have we discovered?"

"He has never seen her," answered Beppo.

"Then any dark-haired, dark-eyed girl will do."

"I am not so sure of that, but at least it gives us a wider opportunity."

The next night Mother Paginaro demanded one hundred lire before she would admit them, and then she seated them in the gloomy hall-room and one at a time brought in four different girls. Each had certain resemblances to the girl for whom they were seeking, but when they came to play the violin even Luigi, easy critic though he was, had to make a wry face. "None of these is the girl," said Beppo, half angrily. "Such noise would never be called playing. You have cheated me."

"Not so harsh, son, not so harsh. These are good girls; they will go wherever you wish them to, and it is a small thing to learn to play the violin. The little Frenchman who lives in the attic—he will teach one for a few lire to play the violin like an angel."

"I want one certain girl, not any girl. Give me back my money."

"No, indeed, I worked hard; I have found not one, but four girls. Do you think that it cost me nothing to send out messages? I have had many to hunt me this girl. Here I have four; any one answers to the description, any one will take any name you wish and go anywhere you wish. I can do no more. You have less of decency than a toad. After this when you have a job to be done, you go elsewhere."

Beppo saw the futility of further argument, and like the diplomat that he was, he turned it off with a laugh, gave the woman another coin, and left the place.

"Again we seem to be drifting," remarked Luigi. "His honor will have a nice bill to pay for this woman's bungling. Why did you not make her give up the money?"

"Are we then to cease to live, or do you intend in the future to devote yourself to a life of labor?"

"To both of these questions I trust the saints will permit me to answer no for many years to come; but what has she to do with it?"

"For money she is willing to do anything—we do not know what next we shall wish to have done. As long as she may share our money she will help us, otherwise she will take another way to get our money. You are not the only man in Rome who can give a knock upon the head," replied Beppo.

"After all, it is not the money which is spent which worries a man; it is the money yet to be spent and which is in other people's pockets."

A restless spirit of energy had taken possession of Beppo, and under its guidance they walked many miles through the picturesque streets of the Eternal City. Suddenly Luigi stopped and seized the arm of his companion in a fierce grip. Beppo writhed in pain and struck his companion a blow upon the chest. As if in answer to a question, Luigi said: "Hist! Do you not hear it? It is her violin. Come, let us go into that wine-shop."

They paused in the doorway for a moment. At the far end of the hall a girl was playing a violin. It was the girl they were seeking.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was on the sixth day of Bertrand's quest that Clarice was electrified by receiving a message which read: "I am sending Nachette home. Forward a thousand francs to reward my assistants. They have been true men." If even such a message as this had not contained a request for more funds, she would have doubted its authenticity. Sometimes she had had several reports on the same day, each containing demands for new appropriations.

After telegraphing the thousand francs, she had spent the intervening time in a state of frantic anticipation, the suspense of which was nearly as distracting as the agony of doubt had been. She reached the Paris station at least an hour before the train could possibly arrive, and when it did she watched each passenger alight with eyes starting from her head. At last a tall, dark-haired girl with a violin stepped out upon the platform, and after a hasty glance Clarice rushed up to her. But as she drew near, she stopped, and a heartbroken cry burst from her lips. "Oh, I—I thought that you—is there another girl with a violin still upon the train?"

"No, I have not seen one. I am Nachette."

"Oh, what do you mean? Why do you say that? Were you sent here? Tell me—tell me at once."

"Yes. Signor Bertrand, he hear me play, he see my eyes, my hair. He say, 'What is your name?' I say, 'Nachette.' He say, 'You are want in Paris.' I come to Signorino Clarice at the Hotel Mercedes."

"But you are not Nachette."

"Yes, indeed, I am Nachette. You wish to hear me play? I can beautiful on the violin much music play. You wish to hear?"

Clarice thought a moment and then decided to take the girl home with her. On their arrival she put her through a set of questions, which the girl answered with prompt frankness and with no apparent attempt to deceive. She said that she had been playing in a wine-shop and that two men had heard her, had asked her if her name was Nachette and if she had ever been in Paris. She had told them that she had been born in Paris, had had many names, and one of them was Nachette; that it had been given to her a few weeks ago by a man who had drunk much wine and had made her play many tunes. He had given her a piece of gold and had told her that she was a second Nachette, and as the name was pleasing, she had taken it for her own. A name is a small matter at the best.

After she had finished her story, Clarice telegraphed to Bertrand that he had made a great mistake and to come to Paris at once. She made sure that he would be able to come promptly by also telegraphing him a ticket. Then while she and the girl were eating dinner, she questioned her further. It seems that the two men who had discovered her had taken her to a third, a man with only one eye and no hair, who had asked her name and had listened to her playing, after which he had run out of

the wine-shop to make arrangements for her departure. When the meal was finished she wanted to play for Clarice, but after one simple tune Clarice made her put the violin back in its case.

As they sat talking together, the girl in the shadow cast by a single shaded bulb, the Professor walked in dejectedly. All the day he had been away, trying to verify a rumor which Jack had discovered in Rome. Jack had met a young Russian at the club who was of rather a gossipy tendency, and as they sat smoking the talk drifted to the Prince. The young Russian had told him of the marriage, the political intrigue, and the affair with the Countess Nina. Jack, while appearing to take only a polite interest in the subject of conversation, had drawn the young fellow on until he had told all that he knew of the peculiar career of the Prince. As soon as they had parted, Jack had telegraphed to Paris telling Clarice what he had learned and detailing one of his own men to trace the whereabouts of the Countess Nina. And Clarice had sent the Professor upon the same errand, but he had not met with the slightest success, and as he had forgotten to eat his meals, he entered the room very much cast down.

As he saw the dark-haired girl sitting with Clarice, he paused; a dazzling light swept into his face, he clasped his hands over his breast, and exclaimed: "Ach, God iss goot, God iss fery goot!" But while the girl continued to sit and look at him with a pleasant smile on her lips and a mild interest in her eyes, Clarice sprang to her feet and touched him on the arm. "Ah, it is not she! Do not be deceived, do not let yourself hope—it is not our little lost girl."

It was well that Clarice was close at hand. As the tide of his joy ebbed, the poor old man was swept along with it. Weak as he was, the shock was too much, and as his knees bent beneath him Clarice caught him in her arms. The girl sprang to her feet and together they eased him to the sofa. He soon recovered, and sitting up looked first at Clarice and then at the strange girl.

"Oh, dat vas an awful shock! Dot vas not kind, Clarice; you knew dat always my thoughts they hover about her memory, and you should not have wounded me so."

"I am so sorry, Professor. I never thought of your coming in and surprising us. This is a young violinist from Rome. She had taken the name of Nachette, and Bertrand sent her here thinking that she was the real Nachette. She has had a hard life, poor little thing, and I am going to keep her for a while and treat her kindly, as I hope that some one has done for our little girl."

The kind-hearted old man took the hands of the girl in his and said gently: "I did not mean to offend you, my child, but we have a sore affliction had, and I was much beside myself; but now take you again your seat, and will you not play for me something upon your violin?"

The girl's dark eyes shone with shy pleasure at the request, and she took her cheap violin from its case and started the measure in G from the opera of "Graustark." The Professor closed his eyes and reclined upon the sofa in dreamy expectation. As the forced and irregular strains of the difficult selection fell upon his ear, he sat up with a jerk. "No, no, little one, not that; that does ferry well upon the stage, but here blay something low and tender."

The girl, a trifle abashed but not at all offended, paused a moment in thought and then started one of the simple melodies of peasant Italy. Here and there she found bits which she was able to render with some feeling, but there were many sad mistakes in her technique. Finally, in a tender passage, it flashed upon the Professor that this was one of the blossoms which had been woven into Nachette's garland of folk-song. He put his hand to his head, exclaiming: "Ah, you must forgive me, little one, but my head it has an aching, and I do not care much for music anyway. All this day wherever I have gone there has been music, music, music; but it is not like the music I used to know. I am getting old; I want just what I want, and nothing else will do."

"I know the way you feel. It is like when my father he die. Ah, he was the great musician! and I—I was then but a baby. I used to sit and watch my father and listen to him, and when he die it seem to me there is no music left in all the world."

"Did not your mother see that you had your lessons?" asked Clarice.

"Ah, lady, my mother she died even before my father; my mother only lived to give to me one kiss. I was but six years when my father die."

"Well, if he was a great musician——"

"There is no 'if' about it; he was a great musician; he it was who taught Marienino."

"Vat? Then the name of your father, what was it?"

"Perucho was the name of my father."

"Vy, little girl, I knew him well. A goot man he was unt alzo a goot musician, but he was too

generous, too trustful, too impulsive. Do you know of what he died, my child?"

"No. I was too young to remember."

"Many who were old enough did not know: it was of a broken heart he died. A friend had taken his wealth and his king accused him of being a conspirator. And so Perucho left a daughter! Who took care of you, my child?"

"Nobody. A woman who said that she was my aunt took me home with her and made me beg upon the street; and of that which I begged, the woman took all. She gave to me a name, and when I said that it was not my name, she beat me. After a while a street-player took me, and he gave me a new name. That has been my life: someone would take me, give me a new name, and make me beg or sing or dance or play for pennies."

"And Marienino—did he not do for you something?"

"He never had the chance. He was not in Rome when my father crept there to die, and I never saw him but once. I found a gold piece upon the street and went to hear him play. When I came away I took what was left of my gold piece and bought this poor violin and ran away from him who was then my uncle; and since, I have tried to remember what it was that my father did to make the violin speak the beautiful language."

The eyes of the little Professor were shining now, and he leaned forward and looked at the girl. "You have neffer a lesson had?"

"No," answered the girl, "never a one."

"And you still can see your father playing and hear the music of his violin?"

"As plainly as I can see you and hear the sound of your voice."

"Ah, little girl, take again your violin—you are von of us. Bertrand, he vas keener of ear than is the olt Professor. Now holt like this your violin; it is a poor, cheap thing, but neffer mind. Now play again the simple love-song."

The old man rose to his feet, beat time with his hand, showed her just which finger should tend to each tone, and made her play it over and over again. The girl's eyes were shining too, and she tried to follow each minute detail as he showed her. After an hour had passed he motioned that she might rest.

"Did I play it better?"

"Better? You played it a tousand times better. If you will but practise each day four or fife hours upon dat von selection, in dree veeks you can blay it as vell as—as any von can the violin be *taught* to blay."

The girl's face fell. "Three weeks?"

"Yes, I do believe it; it may dake four, but I think you can it in dree learn. You have a goot ear, little girl. Some day you vill become a blayer —a real violinist. Alreaty in my heart are plans for you forming."

The girl sat silent. Clarice and the Professor had also fallen into a reverie. At last the Professor looked up and said kindly, but the undercurrent of sadness in his voice was very pathetic: "Little girl, you haf for a few minutes lifted the veil of sorrow from my heart, but it could not stay lifted ferry long. I am going this night to write for you a letter to Marienino. The letter will tell who you are. You will learn the one tune which will tell

what you can do, and the letter will end by saying that the Professor Brahmfelder desires that for the sake of Nachette the great Marienino will teach the daughter of Perucho upon the violin to blay. This vill be the real start of your life, my child. Marienino will be glad to have you with him after he learns to know you, and you will bractise with a great diligence and make a famous name; but neffer again must you take the name of Nachette. It was given in satire to you, but some day, if you work hard, they will not speak of you in satire. Blay me once over the simple selection, and then I must to bed go."

The girl took her violin and touched each string until it was tuned to suit her, while the old man nodded kindly approval. Then she played it through, and he patted her on the head, said a gentle good-night to them both, and walked slowly down the hall to his own room.

Next morning at breakfast he said: "And all the night I have thought of many things. These two assistants of Bertrand, they were men of wisdom. They walked upon the street and listened for the music of the violin, but the voice of the one violin did they not know; but I—I should the faintest whisper of Nachette's violin amidst the howling of a gale or the crash of a battle hear. When once a king of England was taken prisoner in a foreign lant, his harper did travel the world listening until he did hear the music of his liege. This is what I myself shall do. Wherever she is, she is sending forth the sweetness and the sorrow of her soul, and I shall listen at every window in Italy until I hear it—hear it, and bring her back to her own. And you, little girl, must stay for a while with the kind

Clarice. Stay and bractise and study and be ready to make a good impression upon the great Marienino."

"But, Professor, you are not really going to start out upon such a hunt as this?" asked Clarice.

"Vy, certainly I am," answered the Professor, surprised that anyone should not see the unassailable wisdom of his plan the moment it was suggested.

Clarice said no more, but when the meal was finished and the girl had been sent to the Professor's room to practise, she and the Professor held a consultation. At first Clarice was inclined to ridicule his project; but when she saw how his heart was set upon it, she compromised by getting him to agree to postpone it until she had had a meeting with both Jack and the Prince.

She opened her heart and told him all her doubts. She said that she was sure that Bertrand's story of the chauffeur was true, and she proposed getting the Prince and Jack together, telling them, and seeing if she could discover by their actions which, if either, was guilty. She had almost given up the abduction-for-ransom theory, because they had received no letters. The Professor sat buried in thought; finally he said:

"It is a devilish complication. I cannot believe that young Braxton had enough cleverness to do such a thing; and the Prince, he is like a hawk—he would not try to make of it a pretense, he would just swoop down and rush away with her in the eyes of everybody. And if the coachman knows, why does he not try to get money for telling? And if some one else took her for money, why don't they send for it? We have it, and would cheerfully

pay them. When I try to make a reasoning of it, my brain she gets all of a tanglement."

"Well, I shall telegraph to Jack at once, and as soon as we can make sure of him we shall send for the Prince, and after we have all met we shall see where we stand."

While Clarice was writing her telegram, the Professor went in to superintend the girl's playing. She was taking great pains and had remembered most of his instructions. "You will make a good pupil. Music, it is of a most peculiar strangeness. It cannot to perfection be taught, neither can one greatness without instruction achieve. Also some of the greatest masters are the poorest performers. They feel the music, but their fingers cannot obey. I see that you have a good ear. It is a great gift, but also it will cause you much suffering. When it becomes trained, you will see great multitudes applaud a performance which to you much anguish gives. Music, it is a strange gift; ofttimes it passes the dwelling of wisdom and virtue to take up its abode within the home of folly and vice. And yet music is of a great goodness. Well, little girl, bractise as much as you can. I think I saw where there was a violin better than this one, but of a great cheapness. I shall return, and if it is better and also quite cheap, I shall tell you the address so you can go and buy it."

The Professor went out to buy the violin, chuckling softly at the expression upon the girl's face.

CHAPTER XIV

CLARICE was nerved to a high tension upon the night that Jack and the Prince were to meet in her apartment. Bertrand had arrived during the day and had given a convincing although scarcely an exact account of his campaign. But as he had really discovered more than she had learned through any other source, Clarice had treated him kindly and with a certain trace of respect which was very soothing to his pride. She cross-examined him, but he stuck to the main points of his story and assured her that as it was true he cared not who should question him.

Jack arrived a little before the Prince, and although his face was drawn and dejected, Clarice refused to allow him to speak of the real cause of their meeting. Finally the Prince arrived, easy and complacent as usual. He spoke to them all without a trace of embarrassment, and almost immediately asked Clarice if she had any news to offer, confessing with a disappointed sigh that in spite of his best efforts he himself had absolutely no clue. Instead of answering, Clarice turned to Jack with a questioning look upon her face.

"Ah, you know that if I had any news you would have been the first to hear it," answered Jack a bit reproachfully.

"And you?" questioned the Prince of Clarice.

"I prefer to hear all that you have done, and

then if I have anything new to offer, I shall do so; and we shall add the items which appear true, subtract the items which appear false, and from the result outline a new campaign."

"Poor little girl! I wonder if she has been mistreated," said Jack, half to himself.

"No, she has made friends," answered Clarice decisively.

"How do you know?" asked the Prince in a startled voice, half rising from his seat.

"Oh, I do not say that I know, but still I am very sure."

The two men looked at her intently. Her manner had never been so easy nor her speech more correct, and yet the lines of her face had deepened and altered. In spite of her feeling of nearness and comfort whenever she sat by the open window and thought of Nachette, Clarice had mourned for her and yearned for her with all her heart, and the few days had made a great change in her appearance: her complexion was more transparent and the slight trace of mixed blood, sometimes suggested, less noticeable, as though in the great trial through which she had gone, the higher and finer race had overcome the lower; and as she stood calmly before them, hers was the character which dominated the situation.

"Have you had any communication aside from ours?" asked the Prince.

"I have."

"I do not think that this is treating us fairly."

"I do not care what you think, not in the slightest degree. All my thoughts are for that poor, little, lonesome child. Now let me hear your opinions and then I shall offer my suggestions."

"Well," began the Prince slowly, "I have not changed my original opinion, although I must freely admit that I have found little, aside from purely circumstantial evidence, to substantiate it."

"I presume you still think that she left Rome upon the same train that I did?" demanded Jack.

"Yes."

"And that I was directly implicated in her leaving?"

"Since you make a direct question of it, I shall be equally frank: that is exactly the theory upon which I worked."

"Did you try to prove the list of passengers?"

"Certainly."

"What was your result?"

"I found that there was no one upon the train to answer her description except a certain veiled woman who left the train at Nice. I was not entirely satisfied, so continued the investigation and found that the young lady in question, the daughter of the magistrate at Nice, had not been away at that time, that a lady answering her description had come there upon that train, but had left for Paris upon the next train. This I learned through perfectly reliable sources. I also learned incidentally that the magistrate at Nice was a close personal friend of yours."

Jack flushed. "This is true, but the young lady was a cousin of the daughter's; there is a romance in connection with it which I am not at liberty to divulge, but I——

"Then why were you so anxious to have me investigate, unless you were willing to take me entirely into your confidence?" asked Clarice.

"I wanted to remove your suspicions of me, so that you might be perfectly free to weigh each clue at its own value."

"Always you think of yourself first."

"No, indeed; this too was for the sake of Nachette. But," he continued, turning to the Prince, "what was the final end of this clue?"

"It has no end as yet. I discovered that you were financially involved and that it would be to your interest to gain control of—of anything which would bring in a large revenue during the next year. That has been the full result of all my investigations, except to discover that your entire efforts in Rome were to find various bits of ancient history which might be used against me."

"That has been all that you both have done—each seeking to convict the other. The real object of the search has not seemed to occupy your minds at all." The voice of Clarice was very bitter.

"Yes," replied Jack, without heeding her remark, "and I found that the motor-car which took you to the hotel left immediately afterward and did not return to its garage."

"Certainly not; it returned at once to Paris."

"A very odd time to start to Paris. I suppose that you are willing to give the reason?"

"The reason is exceedingly simple. The concerts were over; we should have no further use for the two cars, and I wanted this one to be overhauled. But why do you imagine that I should wish to kidnap the child? You must remember that my suit had not been frowned upon, and I had not been shown by Clarice that my presence was distasteful. I might go further and say that Nachette herself always seemed glad to see me."

"Your suit? What possible right had you to offer to pay suit to such a girl as she?"

"Oh, I am sure that a prince of Russia ranks equally as high as an American boy upon his first trip into the world."

"Does Russia still claim you as one of her princes? And by the way, what is the rank of a Russian prince? There seem to be so many of them."

"The rank of a prince of Russia depends upon his personality," said the Prince loftily.

"Then he has much the same rank as an American gentleman," replied Jack with the irritating smile of a successful fencer. "But I was not speaking of your rank when I asked my question, but of your wife."

The Prince turned upon him with his eyes flashing. "I have no wife."

"I was otherwise informed. But even if your wife made no objection, would the Countess Nina be equally complacent?"

The Prince lost his self-control: his face contracted into a fierce scowl, his lips curling back and showing the strong white teeth beneath. "Boy, I do not know where you formed your estimate of me, but you are treading dangerous paths."

"And I have entered them with eyes open. I know much of you. I know of your different apartments in Paris, and of the intrigue which barred the gates of Russia against you; and also perhaps I know something of your affairs of which you yourself are not aware."

The Prince trembled with rage from head to foot, but he had regained control of his facial expressions. He was sure that this last remark of Jack's

was purely a chance shot, but still it annoyed him. There were two important items upon which he himself greatly desired knowledge. "And have you anything further to offer as proof of your ardor in the search for the lost girl?" The tone was simply taunting, but the glow in the cold gray eyes of the Prince showed the real danger which Jack had invited.

As soon as the two men had grown bitterly personal, Clarice had taken a seat at some distance from them. She had shaded her eyes and was watching, with the unswerving fixedness of the wild animal, each varying emotion which surged across either face. Professor Brahmfelder had taken a seat at the very outset, and had sat with a sad, troubled look in his small, squinting eyes. He did not seek to analyze the different remarks, he merely winced as he saw that they hurt as they fell. These were all old friends, and the love of the tender, silent little man was very intense. Without knowing it, he kept drawing the fingers of his right hand through those of his left, as one takes off a delicate glove.

"I have nothing further to offer. But I think that if it were possible to interrogate the chauffeur who drove me to the station and who started back with Nachette, I could have something further to present," answered Jack.

"I do not believe that there is such a chauffeur, but if you mean the one who drove you to the station, he is in the city now."

"I am perfectly well aware of that and also that he has not been alone for a single moment since his arrival. Would you be willing to send for him now and have him questioned before us all?"

"I certainly would."

"There is the phone. I am sure that I should rejoice at the opportunity."

The Prince took the phone with a smile of confidence upon his lips, called his garage, spoke a few words in Russian, and then after the reply reached him, turned to Jack and said: "I am exceedingly sorry, but he has taken the car out for a trial spin. It was necessary to put in a new gearing-shaft and he is testing its smoothness."

Jack took the phone, called a number, and when it was given him, he said: "Ascertain the whereabouts of Garth, the chauffeur, at once, and let me know here."

"I see we understand each other," said the Prince lightly.

The two men leaned back in their chairs. They seemed to have nothing more to say or to ask. Simultaneously the Russian pulled out a box of cigarettes and the American pulled out a case of cigars. Both looked at Clarice, and she nodded her head. Each man offered his treasures to the other; both refused. Each started to take of his own, and remembering the Professor, arose, and included him. He knew not what to do, but dodged embarrassment handily by taking a cigarette from the Prince and a cigar from Jack—and smoking neither.

The men leaned back in their chairs and smoked in silence. As the cigarette swiftly vanished before the fierce puffs of the Prince, he suddenly straightened in his seat, and looking at Clarice, said: "And now what have you to add?"

"Merely that I absolutely know that your chauffeur has lied to you all the time. Nachette was re-

moved from his car by force and taken away in another car."

The men first looked at her, then at each other. "How do you know?" asked the Prince.

"Through a trustworthy person who is in this hotel at this very moment," answered Clarice.

"I knew all the time that your account of the chauffeur's report was absolutely false," said Jack calmly. "I do not say that you knew it, I merely say that it was false."

The Prince bit his lip, but did not answer Jack. "May I see this trustworthy person?" he asked.

"Not yet; I first wish to examine your chauffeur."

The Prince looked her straight in the eyes. "I wish you could do it right now. If I thought that he was false, I should strike him dead with my own hand."

"It is possible that his fear of this was what made him give a false report," said Jack dryly.

The face of the Prince lighted in sinister triumph; he turned to Jack. "And so you knew all the time that the report was false, and you knew all the time about the veiled lady; you have known so many things that I believe you also know who took her from my car."

Jack rose to his feet, his face deathly white. He looked first at the Prince and then at Clarice. Finally he said brokenly: "I do not know. If I did I should not be here."

"Such speeches sound better upon the stage, because they are spoken by men who are not too startled to pay attention to effectiveness," said the Prince scornfully.

"I suppose that this explains the difference in

our attitudes: you are familiar with crime itself; I have never before been even accused of treachery."

The Prince rose to his feet. "This has gone as far as I can stand it. You will either have to polish your manner toward me, or I shall——"

At this moment the jingle of the telephone caused them all to start. The two men were already on their feet, facing each other. They continued their dramatic pose for a moment, but at the second ring both turned to take the receiver. The two hands touched it at the same time and the two remaining hands clenched. In a moment Clarice had crossed the room and calmly took the receiver. "It is for Mr. Braxton," she said, and Jack took her place.

After a few questions and answers he turned to the Prince and said: "Your craft is still successful. My man reports that Garth left with the car, having been able to throw off his pursuers, and his whereabouts are unknown. What were you about to say when we were interrupted?"

"I shall finish it at a more fitting time and place," answered the Prince with a pitying smile; and Jack, feeling the awkwardness of his position, writhed inwardly.

"But I wish to examine this man myself," said Clarice. "When will you permit me?"

"To-morrow morning."

"May I also be present?" asked Jack.

"As Clarice decides," answered the Prince carelessly. "But," he continued with a quick change of tone, "when may I interview this trustworthy person who is now within this hotel?"

"As soon as I have interviewed the coachman."

"If to-morrow morning at eleven is convenient to you, I shall promise to be here with Garth."

"That will suit me perfectly."

"And may I also be present?" repeated Jack.

"I insist that you shall be present," replied Clarice.

"Then as there seems to be nothing further to discuss to-night, I beg leave to withdraw," said the Prince coldly.

Jack too had arisen to make his adieus, when a low, eerie note was heard, as though the wind were softly blowing across the strings of an æolian harp. All stopped stone-still to listen. Gradually the tune drifted into a simple, tender melody. The two men were transfixed with awe, but as the tune gained force they were able to locate its source, and rushed to the window. Below, in the garden, a girl was playing upon a violin. The moonlight fell full upon her, and at precisely the same instant both men turned from the window, glared into each other's eyes and exclaimed in unison, "Nachette!"

The Prince turned to Clarice and said: "And so you knew all the time and were only seeking to amuse yourself at my expense."

There was a bitter light of resentment in his eyes, but the eyes of Clarice were as hard and cold as the keen blade of a rapier. She looked him full in the face but did not answer. It was a dramatic tableau: she was striving to see the effect it would produce upon him, and he was fully aware of her intention. Neither spoke, and the gaze of each was equally steady; but the situation was broken by the voice of Jack, who had turned to the window and was looking down into the garden.

"It is not she—it is not she! That is not the

playing of Nachette. Oh, Clarice," he continued, turning to the woman, "how could you play a trick like that? You must know where she is; tell me—tell me where she is."

The Prince had darted to the window, and as Clarice looked into Jack's face a wave of true pity swept over her own. His hands were stretched out to her in an appealing gesture, and instinctively she took them and whispered in his ear: "It is no trick; this girl merely happened to go into the garden to play. I shall tell you of her later."

"Tell me of *Nachette?*"

"No, of this girl."

Jack put his hand to his forehead and turned away. When he looked up again, the Prince, still with a scornful expression on his face, had turned from the window and was facing Clarice. "It is very difficult to assist you when you do not trust me; it is still more difficult when you stoop to a low trick in a malicious attempt to entrap me. I am unable to comprehend why you should suspect me; but as you undoubtedly do, it will be useless for us to strive to work together."

"This was entirely an accident, it was not planned. This young girl does resemble Nachette, but I had no idea of having her attempt to deceive you. When fate so willed it, I admit that I watched to see if I could find any suspicious action upon the part of—of anyone in this room."

"I feel that you were perfectly justified even if you had planned it," interposed Jack heartily. "Were I you, I should suspect us both."

"Well, for my part," said the Prince stiffly, "I find it impossible to accustom myself to trickery upon the part of those I claim as friends. I have

done all that I could in the matter, and I shall continue to do all that I can, but in the future I prefer to work entirely alone."

"You will at least keep the appointment which you have made for to-morrow morning?" asked Jack.

"No, not even that."

"Do you mean to say that you will not give us the opportunity to examine your chauffeur?"

The Prince looked first at Jack and then at Clarice. "Yes, as long as I have agreed to it, I shall keep that appointment at eleven sharp. And now, good-evening." With a scant bow to each the Prince left the room.

As soon as he was gone Clarice told Jack of the young girl, and then the Professor told him of the quest which he was about to take. Jack looked at the frail little man before him and a great pity welled up in his breast.

"Ah, yes," said the Professor, leaning forward in his chair, his face shining and his gentle voice full of earnestness. "It will be the grandest work of my life; the thought of what I am doing will give me strength, and each day I shall know that I am coming closer to her, which will keep up my hope. I see by your eyes that you do not think that I can stand the hardship of the journey; but what is hardship?" The old man rose to his feet. "There is in all the world no hardship like suspense, and there is no relief like labor. I have studied long about it, and I know that it is not of a nonsensicalness—ah, believe me, no! Were I to seek for him who has taken her away, that would indeed a foolishness be; but who else so well knows the manner of her playing or the smallest whisper of her violin? I have tried to hide my worry—I

am not a braggart—and I think that I have hid it; yet every night I have upon my bed lain and listened to the voice of her violin, which has seemed to say, 'You know me, you know me; why it is that you do not come to hunt for me?' And again, there is a guild of all musicians—quickly they a comrade recognize, and from them I will ask, 'Have you the wonderful voice of a violin heard in the place where such a voice is not apt to be?' And they will tell me, and I will go. I have talked much with Bertrand. He will not tell me all, for he is a very crafty man; but this is the secret of his success: he listens to all, and when he hears a new note, he questions not the source but does go and investigate. Yes, I shall make my journey; and Clarice, she shall keep the young girl for company."

The old man sat down once more and folded his hands in his lap, and there was a soft, sweet smile upon his lips and a far-away look in his eyes.

Jack arose and took his hand. "Of a truth, Professor, I think that you will find her. I pray that every road may be made smooth to your feet, and that soon you will bring her back to us."

When Jack left, Clarice made the Professor call up the girl, and then he told them that they must both go to bed at once. "But first the little girl must play her tune." The girl played it correctly, and there was much soul to her playing.

"You are a goot girl, my child, and while I am away Clarice will see that you your practice continue. Goot-night, my child, and you"—he turned to Clarice with a fierce scowl upon his face—"you have no sense of duty. Why do you not sleep better and set this young thing an example?"

But Clarice did not go to rest for a long time. As was her wont, she sat by the open window and waited until the moon had risen. "Now we are together again," she said softly. "Oh, my poor lonely little honey-bird, how I wish I could take you in my arms and fold you tight and rock you to sleep as I have done so many, many years! Good-night, honey-bird, good-night."

CHAPTER XV

AND Nachette *had* been looking at the same far-away moon at the same times that Clarice and Jack had. Alone in the high turret of an isolated chateau some distance from Rome, she had sat hour after hour during the long day which followed her abduction, striving to discover some reason for her capture, striving to plan some way of escape.

During the drive to the station with Jack she had been supremely happy, although they had never once spoken of love nor made any plans as to the future; but every look, every word, every move that he had made showed her that she was the light of his life; and the very fact that he refrained from giving expression to his desires and hopes proved that he was able to sink self for her. After she had left him at the station and had started to the hotel, she became lost in reverie, which was broken by the sudden stopping of the motor-car. She heard the angry voices of other men and the sounds of a struggle, and then a man leaped into the brougham, placed a hand over her mouth, carried her to a similar car standing close by, slammed the door, and they started on again. The pace gradually became swifter and swifter, until they were fairly racing along a road which kept getting rougher. At last they stopped in front of a lonely pile of stone, and

the man who had ridden with her opened the door and motioned her to get out. He had not spoken a word since they had started, but had used no roughness, and had simply made a threatening gesture when she had attempted to scream.

There were two men upon the seat in front, and both they and the man who had ridden inside were large and powerfully built. She was conducted into the dark hallway, and after a moment a woman with a candle appeared. She had a cold, grave face, and scarcely looked at the girl, but made a motion for her to follow. They climbed stair after stair, until finally Nachette refused to go any farther. The woman pulled a whistle from her pocket, held it to her lips, pointed up the stairs, and looked questioningly into her eyes. Nachette shook her head angrily and said: "I shall not go another step. I suppose that you have seized me for ransom, but surely there is some room here where I can stay until it comes. I have some money at my hotel, and if you will allow me to write a note I shall send for it at once."

The woman made no reply. She simply kept her questioning, impersonal gaze fastened upon the face of the girl. "No, I shall not go," answered Nachette in reply to the eyes. The woman blew a shrill whistle and quickly two of the men appeared. They waited a moment, but as the girl merely stood in scornful silence, they took hold of her arms and without unnecessary force compelled her to continue her climb. She soon saw the futility of resistance, and shaking off their hands, she finished her journey with a head held proudly erect and righteous indignation darting from her eyes.

The woman entered the room with her, pointed

out the furnishings, and left her without a word. It was a large room, occupying the entire turret, and was furnished with every convenience and much taste; but the click of the key in the ponderous door as the woman left her took away whatever comfort the place might have offered under other circumstances. She first went to the window and looked out. A small balcony encircled the tower, and she stepped upon it and leaned over the heavy stone parapet. The moon had set, and only the brilliant southern stars lit the world with a pale, shadowy illumination. As she glanced down, a shudder passed over her. The chateau stood upon the very edge of a ravine, the gruesome bottom of which was lost in blackness. She walked all around the balcony, but saw that she was in the midst of a wild, mountainous country, and that she might call or signal to her heart's content, but no one would be the wiser.

It was not long before the chilly wind drove her inside. She was too nervous to sleep, although her natural pride kept her from showing any traces of fear. Then with a glad little cry she saw her violin-case and caught it to her breast. Soon she had it out and tuned, and as the old familiar notes began to fill the room, the feeling of absolute loneliness left her, and after barring the door, she undressed and was soon asleep.

She was awakened next morning by a tap upon the door. She opened it, and the woman entered with a tasty breakfast upon a tray. Nachette tried by every means to get the woman to talk, but to no avail; so she motioned her to leave the room, half dressed herself, yielded to youth and the vigorous mountain air, and ate a very hearty breakfast.

After she had finished dressing she took a more leisurely survey of her room. The walls of the ancient tower were very thick, especially upon the north side, where an old doorway had been blocked up. The view from the balcony only served to confirm her original investigation. There was no hope of escape down the outside of the tower.

She spent the day in playing upon her violin and in watching the hilly panorama from her balcony. At noon her lunch was again served in silence. This time Nachette took her violin and played simple tunes from the various nations, smiled, spoke to the woman in English, German, Italian, and French, but the woman paid heed neither to her words nor to her music, and as soon as the meal was eaten left her alone once more.

Nachette was a social creature, and the continued silence was beginning to wear upon her. There seemed to be no reason for it. If she was being held for ransom, why did they not allow her to write for it at once? If they kept her in this silent confinement for very long, she felt that it would become unbearable. Then she wondered what her friends were doing to rescue her: what the Prince was doing, what Clarice and the Professor, but, most of all, what Jack was doing. She felt sure that he would be the one to finally find her; and when he came to the tower, when he opened the door and told her that she was free once more—ah, what would she not give him as reward! Her face blushed warm and rosy as the incidents of their evening in the park flashed through her memory. She knew now how much she loved him. Even Clarice, who had been so kind and thoughtful all her life, even she was but one of many; Jack

was the central figure of her life, and it had taken her loneliness to show it to her.

But after the evening meal was eaten and the turret began to fill with long, quivering shadows, which the solitary candle only seemed to make the more grotesque and threatening, her heart turned to Clarice again. She reviewed her short but eventful life: she saw how at every turn the old servant had been at her side to answer her questions, drive away her fears, and smooth her troubles; how she had entered into every phase of her life, had studied what she had studied, had played the games she had wanted to play, had counseled her, guided her, and had trained her strong, independent spirit without striving to break it. Always the servant, but always something more. They had some trying periods together when the funds ran low, but there was never an hour so dark that Clarice could not see the silvery lining to their clouds, never a time when Clarice would confess that there was a single comfort which she herself lacked.

But this old love for Clarice was so sure and so steady that it had become in a measure a mere matter of course, a common every-day incident like the sunshine or the stars. It was like life, while this new, wondrous, rushing love of Jack's was what made life worth the living.

Still, as the chill of evening settled, and the lonesomeness seemed to take shape and stand about her, she longed for the familiar arms which had shielded her so often; and taking her violin, she sat by the window and played soft and low, and the tones were not those of a maiden yearning for her lover, but the plaintive sobbing of a lost child.

Her eyes were closed as her fingers touched the strings, and the bow crossed and recrossed them, while the girl herself sat motionless in the chair by the window. Not the girl herself either—her body only. Her soul had gone forth upon the wings of the music, had traversed the many miles which separated them and had crept to the side of the sorrowing woman who was yearning for her.

When she opened her eyes the moon had risen. She looked at it for a long time, while the music of her violin still continued. Finally she laid the violin upon her bed, and wrapping a shawl about her shoulders, went out upon the balcony and gazed up at the moon until she fancied she could see a face in it, and the face seemed to smile.

"It is but a small world, after all," she said aloud. "Perhaps we are all three gazing up at you, and that surely brings us near together. I love you much better than I do the sun. The sun is so fierce and haughty that none can look in his face; but you are sweet and gentle and comforting. When I see the Queen again, I shall tell her that yet another thing which the darkness does is to bring close together those who are parted. Can it be possible that it was only last night that I saw the Queen? It seems as though it were years ago. She was a dear, kind lady. I wonder if she knows that I have been taken? I am sure that she would help to find me. The very minute that we are together, I am going to tell Clarice—and Jack too—that if ever we are separated again, we shall each look at the moon, or when there is no moon, at some certain star at a given hour each evening. But I know that they are looking at you now, and that you are cheering them as you are cheering me."

After a time she grew perfectly composed, re-entered the room, said her simple, childlike prayers, and was soon asleep; alone in the dreary old turret, not knowing where she was, nor why she had been taken, nor when she would be allowed to depart, but knowing with absolute certainty that amidst the endless whirl of countless worlds she herself had not been forgotten by the Controller of them all.

CHAPTER XVI

THE days stole by in dreary, monotonous sameness. Nachette tried every way in her power to get the woman who waited upon her to talk, but never once did the woman answer. Once she hid by the door, and when the woman opened it she darted out and started for the stairs upon a run, but at the top stood a tall, grave man, who merely held up his hands. Realizing the uselessness of a struggle, and dreading to give up what little of her dignity was left, she turned and re-entered her cell, where the woman had set the dainty meal and was patiently waiting until it should be finished.

There was nothing to read, there was nothing to see except the wearisome walls of her room or the distant, changeless landscape; there was nothing outside of herself to listen to—but no, this is hardly correct, for she would take her violin in her arms and just let the music come as it would, and many things were new to her, and sweet, and comforting; but still the heavy drag of silence was always the background.

She seemed at times as one treading an endless chain in perfect darkness. She could not imagine a single excuse for being taken out of the happy routine of her simple life and thrust still living into a pitiless tomb. And as she could find no reason

for the beginning, she could reason no cause for the end. Daily she had watched from the tower, but never in all that time had she seen a human being, although in one direction her view seemed to reach for miles.

The only thing in life, aside from her violin, which seemed true to her was the moon. Night after night she sat and waited until it rose, and as it sprang into view a warm feeling of comradeship took possession of her, and she would half close her eyes until it seemed like a small, curved ship which was coming closer and closer and bearing her friends to her side.

It seemed to her that she had been in that lonely tower for years, but in reality it was the evening of the tenth day. She was sitting upon the narrow stone balcony and gazing into the west, which still held a faint tint from the setting sun. Ah, but she was lonely! One by one she called her small circle of friends about her, and as each appeared she felt how warm would be her welcome. Most often she thought of Jack, for she could not rid herself of the premonition that he it was who would finally rescue her. She had tried to banish this conviction, because she did not wish to look upon it as an assured thing and then feel a trace of resentful disappointment if it chanced to be another.

She heard a slight noise in the room behind her, and leaping to her feet, she leaned forward to listen the more intently. Again she heard a noise, and started cautiously toward the door. As she reached it she paused for a moment—for one moment of keen disappointment—and then her sense of justice triumphed, and with a glad cry she darted forward.

The Prince Alexander, a radiant smile upon his

It was the figure of a strange woman.

(Page 178)

face, came to meet her. In the soft light of the single candle he seemed the most beautiful sight upon which her eyes had ever rested, and she held her hands out to him and her lashes were damp with joy.

He took her hands and drew her up to him, and for a moment she leaned against his breast unable to speak; and then the tide of joy, having reached its fulness, surged back again, and with it came a torrent of questions: "Oh, tell me how you found me—tell me why I am here—tell me how every one is! Clarice—is she well, has she suffered much? And the poor Professor, what has he been doing?—and the others who knew me—tell me everything."

She had not mentioned the name nearest her heart, and the Prince had noticed it in a flash—noticed it, analyzed it, and passed judgment upon it almost instantaneously. "They are all well and have not worried much. They are in Paris. Clarice is rather under the impression that you have eloped with young Braxton and that you are content to stay away."

"Eloped? Mr. Braxton! Where is he? Is he not with her? Does she not know where he is?"

A strange look came across the face of the Prince as he stepped out upon the balcony and drew a full breath—a disappointed look, sad rather than bitter. So she still loved Braxton, and her joy at meeting him was simply the joy of friendship and relief. "No, the last seen of him was when he alighted from the train at Paris. He was accompanied by a veiled woman and is supposed to have sailed for America under an assumed name. We searched Paris before I came here; it was only by the merest chance that I located you. Do you also

suspect that he had aught to do with your abduction? I could not trace the motor-car after it reached here."

"Of course I don't believe that he had anything to do with it—I should as soon suspect you; but I fear that something has happened to him. Where can he be? He was not angry or discouraged when he left me. Oh, where can he be?"

"It seems rather strange to me that you continue to take such an interest in him after you have seen how much he thinks of you."

"Oh, it is a mistake! For all we can tell, he himself may have been taken the same as I was. I know that if he were free he would be in search of me. Can't we go away at once?"

The Prince turned from her and gazed up at the stars. When he again looked into her eyes his face had changed and his voice was very sad. "I do not like to tell you, my child, but it is very doubtful whether or not I shall ever leave this place. I have been trapped. In following up this clue I forgot that I ran any danger, I thought only of you, and was pressing on with no one to aid me but my valet. We did not make your disappearance public, you know. As we entered this pass we were surrounded, my servant was slain, and I was brought to you. I asked my captors why they had taken me. I told them that if it were ransom they wished, I should double their demands if they would 'set me free at once, so I could aid in your rescue; but to all my questions they made no reply."

"Oh, that is the way they have treated me! It is terrible! All this time not once has another human being spoken to me. But how did it come that they permitted you to see me?"

"Permitted? I was not given a choice. I was simply marched up here and thrust within this room. Is there no possible way of escape down the tower?"

"Oh, no; I have tried to discover a way, but there is none. But surely they cannot mean to make us occupy the same room?"

"Do not worry, my child," said the Prince reassuringly. "I shall take a rug and sleep out on the balcony. It will not be for long. I am sure that I can discover a way out. And so you say that they will not answer questions?"

"No, they will not. It has been terrible! Oh, how I have longed for some one to talk to!"

"And were you glad to see even me?"

"Oh, Prince Alexander, you know that I count you as one of my very dearest friends; of course I was glad to see you."

"Only as a friend; and during the time that you have been here alone, surely, as you had little else to do, you must have thought of all your past. Did it never occur to you that you could some day feel more than friendship for me?"

The girl fixed her large, candid eyes upon him. "I do not wish to hurt your feelings nor mar in the smallest degree the high regard in which you have always seemed to hold me, but I can never love you—as you imagine you wish me to."

The Prince took a few quick strides up and down the room. "There is no imagination about it. From the first I have loved you. I tried not to show it. I treated you like a child, but instead of outgrowing it, my love has become stronger and stronger, until now it is the one dominating element in my life." He paused and held out his arms

to her. "Won't you try to love me? Just stop holding yourself back and come and taste the richness of my love."

She looked at him in silence. He was very handsome, and his eyes glowed with the passion which he was striving to control. There was a fascination in his every graceful movement, and she was still filled with the great joy of seeing an old friend.

"Ah, Prince, this is not kind! If we are to be in this room together for some time, can't you see that we must establish a basis of relationship? Won't you treat me as though you were my brother? Now don't be angry. In one sense this is a stereotyped phrase, but—you know I never had a brother, I never knew my mother, and do not remember my father. I have led a very lonely life, although on the whole a happy one. Poor Clarice has tried to be everything to me, and I do love her dearly—how much I never knew until this long torturing separation—but still it was not like one's own kin. Always her inferior position has stood between us, in spite of all attempts to ignore it. Won't you try to pretend that you are my brother?"

The Prince stepped out on the balcony again; twice he walked the entire distance around the tower; but when he re-entered the room his face was as pale as that of a man who steps upon the scaffold and waits for the black cap to be adjusted, while the fire behind his eyes burned fierce and red.

"No, I shall not be your brother. This boy who has taken your wayward fancy—he is no fit mate for you, and furthermore he is not even true to you. You will soon forget him, for as you develop you will see that he can neither understand nor appreciate the grandeur of your ambition. To-day you

do not know yourself. You are only a bud forming into a blossom; but when the flower is full-blown, then your heart will yearn for its true mate. I have watched you, I have studied you. When you entered for the first time the royal palace of a king, it was I who felt the tremor of your hand upon my arm; but the closer we drew to the throne, the more composed you became, until when you stood before that glittering array there was not a face there so calm and confident as yours. Marriage is not for a day, little one, or it might do to marry a frivolous boy; but when you select a mate for life, you should choose one who can climb with you to the highest peaks. Look, look into the future, and see whether it will be more fitting to your station to be a princess of the greatest nation of the earth, or to be the mismated wife of a dawdling adventurer."

Nachette sat with her eyes fixed upon a distant star. The insidious flattery of his picture had made its impression. She recalled the perfect ease of the man before her in every situation and compared it with the conduct of Jack, who was ofttimes at a loss to produce the conditions he most desired. At last she sighed and said: "It is true that you have done a great deal for me, and that no matter how far I might climb, you could always stand beside me; but I do not love you, so what difference would all other things make?"

"Love! You have no conception of the meaning of the term. You have merely speculated upon it in a mild, childlike way. It has been ordained that a woman shall love her husband if he be fit mate for her. This feeling which you have for this boy is little different from that which you have

felt for earlier toys—your first ball, or later your first violin; but when your ear learned to discriminate, how quickly did you turn to the finer violin which the Professor gave you!"

"Ah, but I have the old one still, and love it just the same."

"But you cannot lay your first husband aside when you have outgrown him and take another who is able to respond to the requirements which your development will demand."

Again she looked out at the lone star, which shone with dazzling brilliancy. "One cannot reason about love, it simply comes unbidden and takes possession of one; and after that, arguments or logic or material advantage count for naught. I am sorry that you love me—I am partly sorry that I—no, I am not; this love which I feel for Jack Braxton is the best that is in me, and I hope it will live and grow and continue to be the sweetest thing in my life."

She arose to her feet and stood facing him. He looked at her for a moment and then laughed lightly; but the laugh had a sting in it. "When one hopes that one's love will last, when one doubts it sufficiently to feel that it requires defense, one may rest assured that this is not the one great love which will come into one's life."

She bit her lip, and her eyes fell before his. "You are not fair. I am only a girl. I do not know the language wherein one fences, and you take each remark and twist it until it seems to say something which I never intended. I was not defending my love for my sake, but for yours."

"I thank you even for that consideration. Oh, Nachette, love me, love me, love me!"

He drew near to her, he took her hands in his and leaned forward with his flushed face close to hers until his fever-bright eyes seemed to exert a hypnotic influence over her. She trembled, she was as one in a nightmare, feeling a horrible dread but not having the power to free herself. He leaned slowly forward; closer and closer drew his lips, until they rested upon hers in a passionate kiss.

And then the charm was broken. With an unsuspected strength she pushed him from her and glared at him with indignation flashing from her eyes. "Coward!" she cried. "You have boasted of your superiority over others, but you are not able to estimate true greatness. Your position in life was simply an accident; your achievements were simply tricks; you have no trace of moral culture, and I hate you—I despise you!"

"But you will soon get over it; you will soon love me. I never desire too easy victories; the struggle is half the glory of a triumph. I love you more now than ever before. Fight me, fight me still; you will one day love me as fiercely as you fight me now, and the harder you fight me the sooner will come the delicious languor of love. Come, I am going to kiss you again."

She retreated before him, she dodged and placed the table between them, but still he came after her with his eyes fixed upon hers, until once more she felt like the cowering bird before the relentless serpent. She leaped to the door, but it was locked as usual. At last, in desperation, she picked up a small footstool and hurled it into his face. He caught it with a laugh, tossed it aside, and clasped her in his arms. She closed her eyes and held her

head as far from him as she could. He did not kiss her; he simply gazed upon her beautiful, upturned face as she hung limp in his arms.

After a moment she opened her eyes and looked at him in horror. He tried to coax her with his eyes, but her scorn only deepened, and finally he stooped to kiss her. In a flash she had freed her arm and had struck him in the forehead. He only shook his head as a swimmer who has dived beneath a wave, and said softly, "I shall count it as your first caress."

"Prince Alexander, have you gone mad? Let me go—let me go! You do not love me, or you could not treat me thus. Let me go!"

"Not until the lion refuses to claim his mate will I let you go."

"But I hate you. Do you think I could ever marry you now?"

He let her go, and she stood swaying before him. "Listen: I offered you the choice of marriage, I did not offer you the choice of refusing my love. We shall marry if you will, but I shall claim the rights of love whether you will or not."

His voice was very low, but very tense. There was scarcely three feet between them. She looked helplessly at him for a moment, and then her glance swung to the open door which led to the balcony, and she made a quick step toward it. He read her purpose in her glance and intercepted her. Her arms fell to her sides, and she raised her eyes to where the moon had just topped the distant mountain. Her lips moved, and a desperate plea came from between them: "O God, help me!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN the narrow view of life one is apt to imagine that Providence would use only an untarnished instrument with which to consummate a divine achievement; and yet the history of a day or the history of all the ages will prove that the weapons which are chosen of God are ofttimes nicked from former rebellion against his laws.

As these two stood in the lonely tower of this isolated Italian chateau, they seemed to be entirely cut off from human aid. The Prince stood erect, with his smile of victory slightly mantled by pity for the feelings of the sensitive girl, whose inherent virtue had forced him to break before he could possess her. The girl leaned upon a chair, a numb hopelessness clouding the face which had been so radiant at his coming. The room was as silent as a tomb, while above in the sky the same moon which had always before brought her such comfort rose with its accustomed serenity, touched the mountain-peaks with silver, and deepened the shadows in valley and forest.

Suddenly a slight grating noise was heard. Both turned at the same instant, and both faces expressed the same wondering surprise. As Nachette saw the door which she had supposed to be merely an old opening walled up swing slowly inward, she noted, with childish interest in details,

that it was merely a thin veneer of stone cleverly laid upon a massive wooden frame, and then her gaze was focused upon the figure framed in the opening. It was that of a strange woman, a beautiful woman, tall and stately and commanding. As Nachette noted the clear-cut and refined features, she gave a smothered exclamation of thanks and sank into a chair.

The Prince looked at the woman with his eyes starting from his head, and a single word burst from his lips, "Nina!"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice bitter with scorn, "it is Nina, and, as usual, she finds you false to everything which binds the world to heaven and holds the world from hell."

The Prince could not look her in the eyes and walked slowly out upon the balcony. The Countess crossed the room to Nachette and seized her roughly by the shoulder. "And so you too have been added to his list?"

The girl raised her deep, clear eyes and looked unflinchingly into the angry eyes above her. "I do not know what you mean. Until to-night I counted the Prince as my best friend; now I count him as my worst enemy."

The lips of the elder woman curled with scorn. "Until to-night? It has not all come in one single night. Don't deceive yourself; I have seen through you from the first. You with your nameless name, and your hopeless hopes, were willing to pay whatever price the Prince might choose to ask for the influence and the power which are at his command. I have watched each movement of you both. I am willing to believe, because I am convinced of it, that you have played your game with remarkable

skill and have led him on and on; but that you have finally paid, or were about to pay, the inevitable price, I have not the slightest doubt."

The tone hurt worse than the words. As Nachette saw the scorn and hatred in the woman's face and heard the bitter accusation in her voice, she arose and faced her in unfaltering pride. "I do not know who you are, but whatever your own position, you have no right to treat me thus. When you entered this room I looked upon you as an angel sent in answer to my prayer. I have never treated the Prince in any but a friendly way, and——"

"Stop! I have seen much of life, but never have I seen the fault all on the side of the man. I am a woman myself, I know every emotion, every impulse which you have ever felt. I know that always there was a monitor in your own breast which told you that which can never be taught. At the beginning you probably did not know where the path you chose would lead to; but as you took each false step in its turn, you felt at once that it was false."

"I know what you mean. Twice before has the Prince wounded me, but both times he seemed sincerely sorry. To-night when he entered this room he seemed to fill it with joy——"

"I know too well the feeling. This joy itself shows——"

"No, you mistake. It was not alone because it was the Prince who came; I should have been just as glad if it had been any one of my friends. I—I should have been much more glad if it had been one other—one whom I can always trust and who will never fail me. I say that when he came I was

filled with joy; but a moment ago I was ready to hurl myself from that balcony."

"I do not believe you. It is false, false! I can see but one reason for you being here. I did think that you were in love with the boy, but—why did you come here?"

"I was brought here by force."

"But you surely knew who it was who brought you! Why were you glad to see him?"

Nachette started with surprise. "Did the Prince —was it he who had me brought here?"

The Countess laughed. "And do you think that he would rent his chateau for a prison?"

"I did not know it was his. I did not suspect before that he had anything to do with my abduction. Oh, I have been here so long, and in all that time I have not been spoken to by a single person until he came, and at first I thought that he had come to rescue me; and then he told me that he also was a prisoner, and that I had been deserted by—by Jack, but I did not believe it."

The woman turned away, while an expression of intense agony distorted her face. When she turned again it had regained its calmness. "I wish that I could believe you were lying, but I can't. Oh, how can I ever trust him again if your story be true?"

"It is true, every word. I do not wish to wound you, I only want to go back to my friends; but what I have said is indeed true."

With eyes angry as those of a baffled tigress, the woman swept past the girl and walked out upon the balcony. Nachette could hear them talking in harsh, bitter tones. From a chance word here and there which she had learned from the Prince, she knew it was Russian.

In a few minutes the Countess re-entered. "I shall allow you to go. He has told me all. You have used every wile to ensnare him. Your innocent, baby ways were the surest of all, and I know that I was right in my first judgment. You are merely an adventuress, and I should be justified in killing you. Do not speak to me. I have heard as much of your lies as I can stand; almost they convinced me in spite of my own experience. You did not know this and you did not know that. Are you not a woman? A girl of twelve knows more of the charm of allurement than the oldest man that ever lived. It is her birth-right.

"When you trifle with the depths of man's nature, you know as well as I that in the end he will resort to force, which is all he ever holds in reserve. Silence! The doors are opened to the road; my own servants are now in possession. I shall write you a line which will pass you; and as you walk by them, remember that were the message different, they would kill you with the same composure that they now pass you. You have one day's grace. For twenty-four hours there is a truce between us; but after that—I know that he is still under your spell, but if ever you are in his presence again, at that moment your life is forfeit."

The Countess looked for writing material, but there was none in sight. She stood a moment in silence, and then, seeing a small string lying upon the rug, she tied three knots in it. Handing the knotted cord to Nachette, she said: "This will pass you. You had better leave Europe for a time at least. I am just, but I am also inflexible. I mean what I say."

As one in a dream, Nachette staggered to the

door; at its threshold she turned and glanced back. The woman was sitting at the table, her chin resting on her hand. Then, with a little cry, she saw her violin. Hastily crossing the room, she clutched it to her bosom and hurried to the secret stairway. As she started to descend she saw the proud head of the Countess slowly sink and bury itself in her folded arms.

The stairway was absolutely dark and seemed to wind about the tower. There was the rank, nauseous odor which a stone chamber shut away from the sunlight always has, and that awful feeling of dread that the next step might plunge her into a frightful abyss took possession of the girl. As she slowly wound about the tower, she was suddenly seized by the arm. Almost fainting, she stopped, holding the violin still closer to her heart.

There was no word spoken, and finally she remembered the cord and handed it to the unseen man, who seemed to stand in a small alcove. He took it, loosened his hold in order to examine it, and then opened a door behind him. She passed out into the hallway through which she had come ten nights before. It was lighted by dim candles set far apart. Twice before reaching the ground-floor was the string examined by men who seemed to materialize out of nothingness, and each time her heart stood still as the massive, silent guard slowly counted the knots.

Finally she reached the roadway, which showed faintly in the moonlight. She ran down it until she was breathless, and then she turned and looked back at the chateau. All but the tower was hidden, and as its horror came over her she sank upon a grassy bank, and looking up at the moon, she offered

a short prayer. It served to calm her, and she pressed on down the mountain road.

She was still wearing the beautiful dress which she had worn at the court, and as it had a train she was sadly handicapped; but still the hunger for freedom was upon her, and she walked on without thought of fatigue. More and more clearly the words of the Countess stood out before her. She saw that the Prince was an arrant coward, and in his fear of this woman he had not hesitated to lie in order to clear himself. And then the lustful eyes of the Prince would appear before her. Alone in the semi-twilight of the fading moon she felt like a feeble rabbit fleeing from a pack of wolves.

There seemed to be no way for her to turn; she did not know where she was nor in which direction to go except to blindly follow the road. An instinctive fear of all mankind had sprung up in her breast, and she dreaded the daylight, which would reveal her costly evening-gown. Never before had she been forced to plan for herself, and as she looked ahead each step seemed to be between threatening ambuscades. She had not a cent in her pocket. Clarice had always taken care of the money, and had not allowed her to wear jewels for fear it might arouse her vanity. Just as the day was breaking she reached a fair public road running north and south.

She sat down for a moment to make her plan, and finally decided to travel north until she arrived at a town having a telegraph station, pawn her violin and wire to Clarice. She started slowly up the road, for she was very tired. She had not gone far before she came to a small farm-house, and with little thought turned in at the gateway.

She knocked at the door, and a man about forty opened it. He looked at her and then glanced out toward the road. Seeing no vehicle, he looked at her again with growing curiosity. "May I rest and get some breakfast?" asked Nachette.

The man opened the door and she entered. A large, pleasant-faced woman was cooking the morning meal in a back room, and when she saw the dress which their guest was wearing, she began asking questions with great rapidity. Nachette stopped her and told her that she was not well acquainted with her language and that she must speak very slowly. When the woman asked her where she came from and how she happened to be walking in such a dress as that, Nachette scarcely knew how to answer. Finally, she said that she had been taken from Rome to be held for ransom and that she had just escaped. The man and his wife both backed away from her, and the woman told her that she must leave at once. She tried to induce them to give her a bite to eat, but the woman said that they were on the best of terms with the men who made a living by holding strangers for ransom, and that if they were to assist one to escape it might cost them both their lives. The couple continued to talk to each other, and their alarm was so apparent that Nachette, fearing that they might imprison her themselves to hold her until their friends came, bade them farewell and hurried on up the road.

This incident showed her that her fears had not been without foundation, and as she continued her wearisome journey she strove to form a story which would explain her unusual appearance without conflicting with the peculiar customs of the

neighborhood through which she was traveling. She was so weak and weary that each step had become a studied effort; and yet she seemed to feel that both the Prince and the strange, magnetic woman who had stepped into her life were behind her, were seeking her, were plotting to destroy her, body and soul. She reasoned with herself, she tried to believe that her suspicions were unfounded; but in her weakened condition, and fresh from the crushing experience through which she had gone, the thought possessed her, and the great longing of her life was to reach Paris and Clarice and Jack without attracting any notice.

She finally drew near to another farm-house, and drawing a deep breath to steady her nerves, she knocked on the door. A woman opened it, and Nachette smiled wanly into a kind but rather stolid face. She explained that she had come into the country to play at the chateau of a foreigner who lived up in the hills several miles back, that she had been there for nearly a week, but that he had ill-treated her and had finally sent her forth dressed as she was and without a penny.

The woman was sympathetic at once, and began abusing the rich, and ending her tirade by saying that the bandits were the only ones who were friendly to the poor and that a handsome girl was not safe even with them. In the end Nachette bargained with the woman for a peasant-dress—clean but coarse, and not fitting to any degree of nicety—her breakfast, and an opportunity to rest, in exchange for the beautiful dress she was wearing.

She ate ravenously of the plain, wholesome food, and then disrobing threw herself upon a bed and sank into a dreamless sleep. For hours she lay

without a movement, the soothing reaction coming to build anew the weary muscles and straighten out the tangled nerves. When she awoke she sat up in terror, the strange surroundings merging with her late captivity and forming a picture full of dread. After a few moments spent in readjustment, she bathed, and dressed herself in the peasant-garb. It was the best dress of her hostess, treasured from former days when she had tripped in the merry dances of holiday time. It was picturesque and not unbecoming, and best of all, it had transformed her into a fresh young girl of the lower class.

When she left her room she saw an amusing sight. With much exertion, the woman, who had added weight with years, had finally succeeded in squeezing herself into the evening dress which she had so strangely acquired. She was parading up and down the small room affecting the walk of some grand dame, which was oddly at variance with the happy, childish expression upon her face.

Just as Nachette opened the door, the man of the house entered from the outside. For a moment he stood in astonishment, his face gradually lighting up with pleasure akin to that which radiated from the beaming eyes of his helpmeet. Then a cloud gathered, and he asked with fierce directness: "And whose doing is this? Speak, woman! Who gave you that gown?"

The woman, sure of the final outcome, smiled coquettishly and said: "Ah, this is the gift—or at least the bargain price—of one much handsomer than you—ah, much handsomer!"

The fierceness deepened upon the man's face and

the red light of murder blazed in his eyes, while at the same ratio the glint of merry mischief danced in the eyes of his wife. "Ah-ho! and so you have a lover? And you dare to wear his gifts before me! Laugh—laugh while you can, for soon you will no longer be able—you or your cursed lover! What is his name? Speak to me the truth, or I will torture before I kill you."

The woman's vanity was flattered beyond measure, and she continued to smile in triumph while affecting many simple airs. "Ah, I have no right to tell the name of my lover—if I have one. I did not say that I had a lover. I only said that the one from whom I got this dress was handsomer than you."

The man, beside himself with rage, picked up a heavy stick and started for his wife; but as he did so his eyes rested upon Nachette, and he stopped and gazed at her in surprise. His wife laughed aloud and said: "Ah, never make believe again that you do not love me! I have to-day learned the way to keep you always my slave, and in truth I shall look about to see if I cannot find a real lover. She it was from whom I got the dress in trade for the one she is wearing."

The expression upon the man's face was that of a dog caught in the act of breaking a well-known rule; but he was a good-natured fellow and greeted his unexpected guest with rude heartiness, striving all the time to convince her that he had never doubted his wife for a moment but had simply done his part to make her trick successful. "Always a woman is but a child, and she keeps her man pretending until the day of his death."

It was nearly night now, and the woman set

about preparing the evening meal. Nachette was much refreshed, but still her muscles ached from their unwonted exertions. During most of the meal she sat in silence, debating whether to start out at night or wait until early morning. There were arguments to be considered on both sides, but when she found that it was nearly seventy miles to Pisa, she decided to postpone the start until the next morning. During the evening she played some simple music for them, and when she left them the next morning they appeared truly sorry to have her go. The man told her several short cuts, and the woman slipped a few small coins into her hand and gave her a substantial lunch.

All that day she walked, only taking a short rest at noon; but by sundown she had covered less than twenty miles. She stopped at a farm-house for the night, explained that she had lived most of her life at Paris with her aunt, and upon the offer of exchanging music for entertainment, she was admitted into a most hospitable family. There were two grown sons, whom the mother was constantly chiding in a good-humored way for not getting married, and at last the father joined in the sport and suggested to the elder that he might go a long journey and find worse luck than had come to his very door. The son was almost as much embarrassed as was Nachette, but as the evening advanced he grew bolder and cast many a tender glance upon her.

After a short time spent in badinage, the mother took a violin from its case in the corner and asked Nachette if she could play second. Nachette smiled good-naturedly, and said that she had not had much practice in playing second but would be

glad to try. The eldest son took the violin with perfect confidence and tuned it with many flourishes, while the smaller children, who regarded him as a vastly superior being, whispered together and chuckled as they pictured the surprise in store for this stranger when she heard the wonderful playing of their brother, who had gone for two seasons to a master at Leghorn.

The boy could play fairly well, but not one bit better than he thought he could. As soon as his own violin was in tune, he kindly took that of Nachette and tested it to see if it was correct. He made a few changes and handed it back to her. Nachette was enjoying herself greatly and took the instrument awkwardly, while the boy rose to his feet and ran through a few trills before starting the aria from Villerian. She followed him with simple harmony which brought out the lead without becoming prominent enough to detract from it. As they finished, the boy bowed to her and said: "You play very well. You must have had some instruction, and indeed your violin has a fine tone."

Nachette made a light answer, and again they started to play. The homelike atmosphere had taken her out of herself and had made her forget for a space the sadness of her own plight, and as she followed him from selection to selection, she forgot the part she had started in to play. Gradually, as the spirit of music took possession of her, she allowed herself more and more range, until, wholly forgetting her personality, she gave herself entirely to the demands of her violin. The boy played on, buoyed up as it were by the strength of her support, he building simple pieces of lattice-work which she immediately covered with gor-

geous flowers. On and on they played, until he himself became dizzy by the heights to which they had climbed. He paused and looked at her. She had forgotten them all and was leaning back with half-closed eyes, while the music poured forth from her violin like a golden stream which bore them forth to a great new ocean of melody.

When she stopped they were all still for a long, solemn minute, and then the boy sadly put his instrument back in the case and said: "Ah, signorina, I can never learn to play the violin. I thought I was doing so well, but now I know. Will you not play for us again?"

Nachette bit her lip in disappointment, but it was now too late to hide her talent, so she cheered the boy as best she could, told him of all the hard years of study and practice behind her, assured him that he was a good player and that she was a good judge as she had heard the best, and then they all retired for the night. As they parted he looked her wistfully in the eyes and said in a low, earnest tone: "Signorina, what my father said was but a jest; yet in my heart I wish it could be true." And Nachette smiled and patted his hand.

Next morning, after an early breakfast and an affectionate farewell from all the family except the eldest son, who had left word that his work had taken him early from home, Nachette started on her wearisome trudge toward Pisa. She had not gone far before she came to where the boy was waiting at the roadside. His hat was in his hand, and his face was clouded with embarrassment and glorified with a high purpose. As she drew near to him, he said: "Signorina, I well know that you can never think of me, but I shall never forget you.

You will go into the world and you will make a great fame by your playing; I shall work on, and some day I too shall play after a fashion. I have heard some good musicians, but none who played as you. See, I have brought a little money which I have been saving. Take it and go to Paris, and I shall always look upon it as the money whose spending brought me the most happiness."

He held out a small sack of coin to her. She opened it and found it filled with small silver and copper coins, and a lump in her throat seemed to stifle her. "Ah no, I thank you very much, but I cannot take it. I might not be able to send it back to you, and anyway, I should not wish you to run the risk. Why do you not take this money and go to a good instructor?"

"It was for that I saved it. I work hard until I have saved enough for a term, and then I go and study as long as I can make it last. But I should rather have you take it than to spend it myself."

Nachette thanked him over and over for his kind thought but would not take the hard-earned money, and her eyes were wet as she took his address and bade him a reluctant farewell. He had done much to dispel her growing belief that there was far more of evil than of good in the world. Looking back when she reached the turn of the road, she saw him still standing and gazing after her. She waved her hand to him, and he waved his in return; and as she walked on up the road her heart was lighter than it had been for days.

Still, the road was long and hard. Several times men attempted to make advances to her, and at noon, when she sat in the shade to eat her lunch, she was much discouraged once more. She dropped

asleep after her simple meal, and was awakened by an evil-looking man attempting to loosen her hand from its grasp upon her violin case. At first he seemed inclined to be rough, but seeing some laborers coming up the road, he hurried away muttering under his breath.

This aroused her anxiety once more, and she hurried on up the road with the old fear tugging at her heart. The sun was beginning to get low in the heavens before she paused from sheer weariness. There was no house in sight, and it was a wild bit of country. She sat down at the side of the road, and putting her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, gave herself up to bitter thoughts. She could not recall ever trying or even wishing to harm a living creature, and it seemed wrong and cruel that she should not be allowed to lead her own simple life in her own quiet way.

The evening hush settled over the landscape, the shadows grew longer and deeper, but they were as nothing to the shadow which lay upon her heart as she sat with her face in her hands and yearned for the loved ones far away.

CHAPTER XVIII

AS she sat thus, a lonely voyager marooned upon the barren reef of desolation, she was aroused by a hoarse roar. Starting to her feet in terror, she saw a large touring-car speeding up the road. The sight at first added to her alarm, but as she saw that it did not contain the Prince or the strange woman, she sank weakly back upon the grassy bank, and watched the car rapidly draw near. It contained a young man and a girl in the front seat and an unaccompanied man in the tonneau. Just as they were about to pass Nachette there was a sharp report and a tire burst.

"I told you that you would have a smash if I let you run it," said the man in front.

"Indeed, a punctured tire is no smash; it is not classed as an avoidable accident, but as a direct visitation. Never mind; climb out and fix it, and then I shall run it some more."

The two men climbed down and with much good-humored grumbling fell to work upon the tire, while the girl, whose active mind especially dreaded inaction, turned to Nachette and immediately sought to draw her into conversation. She spoke even less Italian than did Nachette, and made many frank asides in English to her two escorts, who made equally free answers in the same language. They appeared to be upon terms of the

greatest intimacy, and some of their remarks were embarrassing to the girl, who was not supposed to understand them.

Finally Nachette caught a few French words intermixed with the peculiar Italian of her questioner and immediately answered in that language. The newcomer gave a sigh of relief and said: "Well, I am glad to know that you can understand French. I don't suppose that I can talk French perfectly, but at least I can make myself understood. How did you learn it?"

"I have lived in Paris," answered Nachette, "and am trying to get there now, but have no money, and do not know how I shall ever be able to walk the distance."

"Walk the distance? To Paris? Why, you will never be able to walk to Paris in the world. Boys, what do you think? This poor child is trying to walk to Paris because she has no money."

"Now don't let her impose on you," said the one who had ridden alone, speaking in English. "The chances are that this is only a game. About all that you have done on this trip has been to discover the needy, and I have no doubt that we have been so badly imposed upon that we have been advertised in the beggars' journal."

"I tell you what we'll do, anyway: we'll give her a lift into Pisa, and she can ride with Gerry and keep him from getting lonesome," said the other man.

"Of course," answered the girl; "and at Pisa we'll make provision for her to go on to Paris."

"You can't tell. Gerry may fall in love with her by that time and want to keep her with him all the way."

"Perhaps you had better let Gerry speak for himself, John," answered that individual as he gave the finishing touches to the tire.

And so it was settled, and Nachette was soon seated in the comfortable back seat of the big car and whirling along the road which had but recently appeared so threatening. As he took his seat, Gerry gave his companion a critical examination, and then said lightly to the occupants of the front seat: "Upon my word, children, this is a find. If she could only speak a Christian language, I'm not so sure but that I might act upon the honorable suggestion of the honorable Adam. In the language of the chosen, this young thing is a peach."

"In the garden of Love, where they say only peaches grow," sang Adam impersonally.

"Now, Gerry, don't, for pity's sake, start a flirtation with a strolling musician," said the girl at the wheel.

"Let him alone, Eve," said Adam; "he has not fallen in love for nearly a week. We don't want him to demonstrate spontaneous combustion."

Nachette was looking about her at the scenery and endeavoring to maintain the pleased, childlike expression of a young peasant-girl on her first motor-car ride; but it was a hard task to ignore the remarks, and she was almost sorry that she had not confided in them at the start. She determined to do so at once, but the next remark put an end to such a decision.

"Well, I should think after his last experience he would be willing to wait a long time. Tom Helton told me that it is absolutely true that this Countess Nina is the sweetheart of a Russian prince who would not hesitate a moment at arranging the

preliminaries of Gerry's funeral. He meant it, too."

"Oh, cut it out!" interposed Gerry. "You and Tom Helton and the whole bunch have been soaking in so many of these guide-stories that you believe every other person you meet is wearing a poison ring. Listen to the opening jolt of my soon-to-appear Odd-a-cie:

> The guide's a great magician,
> Now this cannot be denied;
> For the guide guys the tourist,
> And the tourist then is guyed."

The car spun rapidly along, the two in front soon settled into a confidential conversation which caused them to forget the other occupants of the car, and Gerry gave himself to the pleasing task of becoming acquainted with the beautiful young peasant-girl. His French was largely of the correspondent-school variety, but his eyes had the true cosmopolitan trick of conveying those tender little messages which are themselves older than any language upon the face of the whole earth. As he had often said in his own defense, he traveled about so much that he did not have time to make love in the courtly, old-school style.

He had a frank, inviting face, and under ordinary circumstances Nachette would have enjoyed talking with him; but the name of the Prince and the possibility of his being brought once more into her life through this new agency filled her with alarm, and she was silent, while the sad yearning in her dark eyes soon attracted the attention of the young fellow beside her.

"Anything wrong?" he finally asked in a serious tone.

she looked into his face. It seemed worthy of trust, but the new sense of doubt was too strong, and she dared not confide in him. "Yes," she answered in a low voice; "I wish to get to Paris to try to earn my living by my music, but I have no money and am afraid that I can never walk the distance."

"Oh, pshaw! Don't call that trouble. Why, if I threw a droop every time I was broke, my face would be so lined with trouble-tracks that it would look like the railroad map of Illinois. When we get to Pisa I'll express you on to Paris and give you a letter to one of the men at the wheel."

There was a picturesque ease in Gerry's manner which his long practice of condensing the first few years of an acquaintance into that many minutes had perfected, and Nachette began to feel that he was an old friend. Even his peculiar speech was fascinating, intermingled as it was with Italian, German, and whole sentences of American slang.

"I have relatives in Paris," answered Nachette, "and if you can advance me the money for my ticket, I shall send it to you the moment I arrive."

"Oh, never mind the finance. We'll be in Pisa in a few minutes now, and I want to get acquainted with you. Fact is, I like you very much."

For the balance of the ride they got along famously. Nachette felt that her period of worry was nearly over, and as the anxiety left her her old-time buoyancy returned and she fenced with her companion with an ingenious skill which pleased them both. Ever and anon he would break out into an American exclamation regarding the unexpected wit and cleverness of the Italian peasant.

Just as they entered Pisa he slapped Adam on the back and said with enthusiasm: "By George, old fox, you guessed it! She's a find of the first water."

"In love already, Gerry?" asked the girl.

"Not swimming yet, but wading out pretty far. She's too shrewd to let me flirt. By Jove, she's as smooth as a reformed summer girl. Most interesting study I've met on this side."

"Have you decided what to do with her?"

"No, she decided. I'm to freight her into Paris, and she insists upon returning the investment. Playing her rich relatives to loosen their purse-string. The only thing that worries me is whether or not a young thing like her should be allowed to make the journey alone."

"By no means," laughed the girl; "you ought to go along to add respectability."

They drove to a hotel not far from the station, and Nachette consented to accept dinner, providing it would not prevent her from catching the first train to Paris. As the next train did not leave until nine o'clock, they ate a pleasant meal together, and immediately after Nachette bade a kindly farewell to her new friends and was driven to the station by Gerry. Just as she was about to alight her attention was attracted by another carriage which had just driven up, and with a shock which drove the blood from her face and made her limbs tremble, she saw Prince Alexander alight. Clasping Gerry's arm, she besought him to drive her away. He looked into her face, and seeing the real terror there, he asked no questions but ordered the driver to turn about and drive slowly back.

Nachette leaned upon the cushion breathing rap-

idly, and he did not speak to her until she had recovered something of her former composure. Then he asked kindly: "What is the matter, little one? Don't you want to go to Paris?"

"Oh, I want to be in Paris—it means almost the same as heaven to me; but I dread the journey. Oh, I hate to go there alone!"

"What!" said Gerry, speaking the word in three syllables and looking at her in unfeigned surprise.

"Oh, do not misunderstand me, but—Prince Alexander got out of that other carriage, and I fear him."

"What!" repeated her escort. "Prince Alexander? Oh, I see! You have heard of that nonsense. It was nothing at all. I hardly spoke to the woman, and simply made up a story to amuse my friends; but then how did you know who I was, and where did you ever hear of it, anyway?"

"Oh, I don't know anything about you and the Prince, but I fear him worse than death on my own account. He is a terrible man."

"Ah-ha! And so my little peasant-girl has not always lived on the top of a high lonely mountain. Well, what shall we do? Supposing we take a drive, return to the hotel, and next morning you can start by daylight; there will be no danger then."

"I do not know what to do. The mere sight of that man seems to take away my power to think. Yes, we shall return to the hotel, and I shall leave to-morrow; but even in the daylight I should dread to be even traveling in the same direction as that man—and we do not know that he has taken this train. He may have simply come down to see who got on or off. Oh, I don't know what to do!"

"Better let me do the planning. You are an odd combination. Sometimes you talk like an old-timer, and then again like a child in the primer-class."

They drove for a short time and then returned to the hotel, where Gerry told his companions of the peculiar behavior of his peasant-girl. They discussed the situation freely in English, and decided that as the girl carried a violin which she seemed loath to lay down even while she was eating, she must have been playing at some place where the Prince had stopped and that he had offended her.

"I am going to see if she can play," said Eve; and then, turning to Nachette, she asked her if she would not come up to the balcony which opened from their parlor and play for them.

"Why, I do not play very well; but I should be glad to try to please you after all your kindness to me."

As they were going to their suite Nachette was pondering over this new complication, and as she started to tune her violin she forgot that she was only a peasant-girl with small opportunity to become a finished musician; but as she started to play she recalled her assumed position and chose a simple melody which would not require much technique.

Still, her simple, open life had in no wise fitted her for pretension, and as her master, the violin, demanded more and more of her attention, she gradually drifted into richer and more complicated melody, until her listeners sat in silent amazement, and other faces leaned from surrounding windows to catch the rare beauty of her brilliant serenade. It was the sight of one of these faces which brought Nachette to a sense of her danger, and suddenly, in the midst of a fanciful run wherein the beautiful

notes fell from her violin as blossoms might fall from the tapering fingers of a dancing-girl, she stopped with a gasping cry; her violin dropped across her knees and her hand was pressed against her forehead.

In an instant her three companions rushed to her side, while a hum of voices was heard expressing a desire to know why she had stopped and a wish that she would continue.

In answer to the anxious questioning of Eve and Gerry, Nachette told them that for the moment she had forgotten her position and that now she was filled with dread lest the Prince might have heard and would know where she was.

They tried to reassure her, but her real dread was so apparent that finally Eve said: "I am not going to have this poor child worried another bit. We are only going to be in Venice a day; let's take her with us and then go on to Paris with her. Adam and I are creditable chaperons, I am sure, and this is exactly what we shall do."

"Surest thing in the world," added Gerry.

"I'll bet you're both right," said Adam.

The proposition was made to Nachette in French, and as she had eagerly awaited it, she accepted without a moment's hesitation.

"I don't know who she is, but after that playing I am willing to stake my life that she is not an ordinary peasant-girl," said Eve.

"Pooh! I was willing to offer bigger odds than that two hours ago," said Gerry loftily.

"She will be frightened to sleep alone to-night, and I shall sleep with her," said Eve, and then continued musingly, "and no doubt she will feel at liberty to confide in me."

"You two have been opening books; here is my bet," said Adam: "I bet anything you like against anything you wish, that this young girl has found a home for just so long as she is able to keep her secret and continue to surround herself with this delightful air of romantic mystery."

The night passed without incident, and they left early the next morning without the Prince giving them further cause for anxiety. The trip to Venice, which occupied the entire day, was very pleasant and entirely uneventful save for the fact that Gerry was becoming more and more convinced that at last he was really and truly in love.

Several times along the way Nachette played for them as they rolled along through the beautiful scenery, and after each performance Gerry sought to get her to talk of love as beautifully as she played of it; but each time she was able to elude him, which only served to make him the more eager. Nachette was beginning to feel alarm at the warmth of his glances, and while she was loath to appear ungrateful, she began to dread the balance of the journey to Paris.

It was nearly dark when they entered Venice, but after a hasty toilet and dinner they decided to enjoy their first gondola ride upon the canals. When they reached the landing Gerry looked at the boats critically and said with a grave shake of the head: "They do not look safe to me. I should never dare risk my life in one with three other people. You and Adam take one and I shall look after our guest."

"Oh, they are perfectly safe," said Nachette hastily, while the other two laughed.

"I shall leave it to the chauffeur." said Gerry

with overwhelming gravity, but giving the gondolier a sly wink. "Do you consider these boats safe for more than two passengers?"

"Well, signor, they will carry four, but to be absolutely safe two is the right number."

"As usual, my riper judgment has been vindicated," said Gerry, assisting the reluctant Nachette into one gondola, while the remaining pair took another.

"Never fret, little girl, I shall keep right beside you," assured Eve.

It was a beautiful night, soft and warm, and the canals were alive with the picturesque gondolas bearing their loads of merry passengers, their lights and their music. At first Gerry contented himself with cheerful jests which included the entire party, and Nachette enjoyed the soothing motion of the gondola and the soft harmony which floated over the water; but after a time the gondolas became separated. It is impossible to tell just how much Gerry's wink was responsible for this, but the drivers of public conveyances are men of much discernment, and seldom indeed are they opposed to the custom of tipping.

As soon as the other gondola was lost the manner of Gerry underwent a marked change. He no longer gazed about the canal seeking some odd sight which would father a joke, but instead began to talk to the girl beside him in a new and tender tone. At first she took it lightly and sought to turn it off as mere pleasantry, until at last his warm, passionate tone and deep, burning glances warned her that she had aroused in this man also the emotion which she most dreaded.

With a weary sigh she sank back upon the cush-

ions and half closed her eyes. What was the use of struggling? She loved but one man, and had not the slightest desire to call forth anything stronger than friendship from the heart of any other; and yet wherever she went some strange magnetic influence seemed to act like a charm upon the men with whom she associated even for the briefest time. The handsome, open face beside her in the gondola became flushed and warm, and gleamed with the keen, eager expression of the beast of prey. Perhaps even more perfectly than himself she felt the lower forces of his nature fighting for the mastery—felt them and also noticed that they did not arouse her sense of anger, but only her deep sympathy, as though she were willing to share in the responsibility of having brought them forth.

She had grown with incredible rapidity during the last few weeks, and already there was much of the maternal in her view of life. She seemed the elder as she opened her eyes once more and looked into his, and in an instant her mind was made up. Leaning forward, she put her cool hand upon his burning forehead; he reached up his hand and taking it tried to pull it to his lips, but she gently maintained its position and slowly shook her head. "Listen," she said slowly; "I do not love you, I can never love you—I already love another. You are giving both of us pain, and if you do not regain your self-control you will cause both of us much regret. Now take a seat at the far end of the gondola and I shall play for you."

He looked fixedly into her eyes and she returned his gaze steadily. There was no sham: he showed the strength of his desire; she showed that she had

fathomed it, had acknowledged its right to exist, but denied its right to bring sorrow into her own life. About their gondola the careless voices continued to ripple forth in laughter and song, while within the old fierce battle of God and the beast was waged, with a man's soul as the stake.

A long, full minute dragged by, and then the man buried his face in the rough folds of her skirt, and she could feel the boat quiver with his trembling. She gazed down at him in silence; he had surrendered—but to whom? After a time he raised his face, and it was white and hard as marble. "I shall go to the front of the boat," he said in a deep, tremulous voice. "Being honest with yourself and with me has saved us both. Are you sure you love —this other man? I want you to marry me—will you marry me?"

"I shall play to you first," she answered softly.

When he was seated she played to him: hymns and cradle-songs, battle-marches and airy dance music; but nothing of the love of man for woman —the great underlying foundation of life, the force which builds the home in the wilderness on the one side, and wrecks empires on the other.

After a time, when peace had come to him, she said: "No, I cannot marry you. I truly love a good man, and he truly loves me. This is but a passing fancy with you, produced by the soft night, the lights, the music, and the odd sense that we two are drifting along together in a tiny world of our own. This is not love. In a day you will begin to wonder at it, and in a short time it will be only like a strain of music or the perfume of a flower."

"No, I love you, and I mean to win you if I can,

but I shall never frighten you again. Will you not tell me something of yourself and let me come and see you in Paris?"

"Yes, after you have learned the real meaning of your feelings to-night."

"I know now—I love you."

For a long time they sat silent, and then she played again, soft and low and melting, not the notes of living love, but the echoing sweetness of a tender memory. Over and over she played the same refrain, until he found himself humming it.

"What does it tell you?" she asked.

"I can scarcely say," he answered; "it seems to be trying to tell me something—something which happened long ago—but I can't catch the words. I seem to be ever just at the point of grasping them and then they float away. Tell me, what does it say?"

She played the refrain over a few times, while he hummed it with ever increasing assurance, and then she sang in English these simple words:

> Like a strain of sweet music,
> A rambling perfume,
> A moonbeam caressing the lilacs above,
> We met and we parted,
> Like wandering spirits,
> But thrilled for one day to the magic of love.

He sat silent while the boat drifted on. She kept playing the refrain over until he fitted the words to it and sang them softly. "Is it part of a song?" he asked. "What is the rest of it?"

"That is all I have ever heard, and I never heard it until my violin first sang it to me a few moments ago."

Suddenly he looked at her in surprise, while a blush of embarrassment swept across his face. "And do you understand English?" he asked.

"I am an American," she answered.

He turned away and said nothing for some time. At last he shrugged his shoulders and said: "I suppose you are anxious to return to the hotel."

And then the incalculable feminine in her nature came to the surface. She had accomplished her purpose, and now she did not wish him to suffer on her account. "I have enjoyed this evening very much, but I suppose that we really ought to go home."

He looked at her with wide-open, eager eyes. Instantly his ear had caught the note in her voice, and it seemed the love-note to him. Her face was kind, and as her eyes met his they smiled the smile of well-tried companionship.

"May I sit beside you?" he asked.

She shook her head but did not speak; and as he made as though to approach her, she raised a finger in half-threatening seriousness. She was not coquettish, she enjoyed the friendship of this man, and she wished to keep it, but the glow in his eyes deepened and she finally said: "Now I do want to go back to the hotel. Oh, I want so much to go to Paris —to Paris, where I am known, and where there is not one misunderstanding following another."

She made a gesture of weariness, and a sudden look of astonishment swept across his face. "Tell me who you are—tell me who you are! I knew that you were no peasant-girl from the very first. Tell me who you are. Oh, I can't give you up! I won't give you up! I shall find out who you are, and I shall never give you up."

"Please take me to the hotel, and please do not mention the fact that I speak English," was all the reply she made.

He gave the order for the gondola to return to its landing-place, and was much surprised to find that it was not far distant. The gondolier had not labored incessantly, for he was a very wise gondolier. They soon reached the hotel, and found that the rest of the party had only returned a short time before.

As they walked down the deserted corridor toward the parlor of their suite, he abruptly came to a stop. She turned to see what the cause was, and he took both of her hands and kissed her upon the lips. There was no softness in her eyes now, they flashed fire; but she did not speak. She simply tightened her lips, and with head held high walked on to the parlor, where she knocked upon the door.

He had reached her side by the time it was opened, and they entered together with composed faces. They sat and talked for a while, commenting upon the evening and drawing plans for the morrow. Nachette did not have much to say, while Gerry, seeking to appear natural and at ease, kept up a constant babble. She soon excused herself, saying that she had a slight headache and was very tired.

Going to her own room, she shut the door and sat by the open window with no light save that which filtered dimly in through the curtain over the transom. After a time Eve came and knocked softly at her door. Nachette made no response, and she tiptoed away again.

When all the house grew still, she turned on the

light and wrote a short note thanking them for their kindness and asking them to address "The Peasant-Girl, Opéra Comique," and that she would be glad to further express her obligations. Then she turned out the light, clasped her violin under her arm, and quietly left the hotel. When she reached the street she knew not which way to turn. She was farther from Paris than when she had first entered the motor-car, and all the money she had was a few small copper pieces.

She walked sadly along the nearly deserted streets, shrinking to one side whenever she saw a form approaching her. On and on she walked, crossing bridge after bridge, until at last from sheer weariness she sat in the doorway of an ancient house and sank into a troubled sleep.

She was aroused by a slight touch, and starting to arise, she saw that it was the lean form of a stray cat. There was so close a bond between them that she picked up the unkempt creature and softly stroked its soiled fur; but there was little response from the cat, and after a time she put it upon the pavement again and it hurried off with never a backward glance.

"She has learned her lesson," said Nachette to herself. "She has learned to trust no living creature; but ah, God! how much she has lost—how much she has lost!"

CHAPTER XIX

NEXT morning, when Nachette awoke from her wearisome slumber, she scarcely knew which way to turn. She had barely enough to purchase a coarse breakfast, and as she ate it she strove to formulate a plan. The more she thought it over, the less inclined she was to risk her violin. It seemed like her last and only true friend, and her feeling for it had assumed such importance that it bordered upon the morbid. She knew not the customs of the pawn-shop, but as she pictured a list of personal questions put with rude freedom by an officious stranger, her nature rebelled. Finally she decided to try the telegraph, and after a hasty glance up and down the street, as though she were an escaped criminal, she left the cheap restaurant and ventured to steal along in the direction of the office.

She reached it without adventure; but just as she entered it, her heart stopped with a shock, and she could scarcely keep her feet. A man was writing a despatch; and though his back was toward her, she instantly recognized him as the Prince. With a pale face she turned and hurried up the street, crossing bridge after bridge and paying little heed to her direction. As she walked hastily along with eyes either downcast or glancing furtively about, she chanced to see a small silver coin

lying on the pavement. With a little gasp of joy she picked it up, and clutching it tightly in her hand, she hurried on, fearful that it might be taken from her.

No captain of industry ever pondered the investment of his millions with more care than this poor child sought to find the direction in which this little disk of silver would give her the greatest leverage. A bitter protest was gradually growing within her at the lack of balance in her education. There had been absolutely nothing left for her own planning, and these faculties lacked the strength which even a small amount of exercise would have given them. Like a cloud-burst the problems of her sex had burst upon her, and now this other question of existence had risen up and confronted her with dreadful visage. She was like the cage-bred canary turned adrift in the winter's storm. Her mental vision possessed no perspective; all things looked gross and threatening; all creatures appeared intent on evil.

In the end she chose the curious purchase of a thick veil. It seemed to hide her from the gaze of those she feared were pursuing her and to give her a new assurance. Still she did not have the courage to play for money during the daylight, and wandered to the poorer part of the city, where she sat in the shade of an old building and watched the careless playing of some half-clad children.

When nightfall gathered hunger gave her no other choice, and she walked to one of the landings where a small band of musicians were already playing. They did not greet her in very friendly fashion, but she took her post at some little distance and played one simple melody after another. She

played the homely music with perfect accuracy and much feeling, but without the wonderful variations and improvisations which had made her playing stand out in glowing contrast with that of all her contemporaries.

Still there was a note of newness which attracted attention, and this was fostered by the heavy veil she wore. The poor, tired old world is constantly searching for something new in its amusements, and soon Nachette was receiving more pennies than all the other players. They had resented her coming, and her success naturally incensed them, so that during a lull their leader, a short man with cruel features, approached and warned her away.

She had not thought even of making a protest, and had already started to find a new place, when the youngest one of the group suggested to the leader that they add her to their force and thus reap the benefit of her superior earning capacity.

This suggestion was acted upon at once, and while Nachette did not like the face of the leader, she was attracted by the honest face of the boy. Finally, after an unusually successful evening, the leader decided to rent a gondola and go out on the water, as there were then few people loitering about. They did so, and as they slowly swung to the center of the passing gondolas, which were so close together that they formed a procession, they rehearsed a few numbers. At each new number the girl was able to offer suggestions as to harmony, and her own playing was such an addition that the leader smiled cunningly beneath his black mustache and counted in advance the gold which this streak of luck was to bring him.

They did receive a liberal amount from the other

gondolas, and the leader kept urging Nachette to play a solo, but she resolutely refused. Finally she offered to take the mandolin from the third man and play a solo upon that. She was perfectly at home with the instrument, and her solo brought in a shower of silver and repeated encores. While Nachette was playing her encore, the leader handed his own violin to the third man and himself played upon that of Nachette. Instantly he noted the wonderful beauty of its tone and the perfect response it gave to every slightest call. Holding it up to the light, he noticed its age and workmanship, and instantly his face lighted with the fierce glow of avarice.

As the music ceased, he tried to purchase the violin from her for a small sum, and when she refused he became threatening. But still she refused, and he ordered the gondolier to take them up a narrow, dark canal, where he told Nachette that she could either make up her mind to accept what he offered or give up the instrument for nothing and be put ashore at that lonely place without a penny. At first she endeavored to act as if she did not believe him capable of so mean an action, but as he continued obdurate, she clasped the violin to her breast and burst into tears.

With a muttered imprecation he seized her wrists and tried to loosen her hold. The other occupants of the gondola had sat in silence up to this point, but now the boy leaped to his feet with eyes flashing and a drawn stiletto in his hand. "If you do not leave her alone, I shall kill you," he cried excitedly. "Of all the players of Venice she is the best, and she has a right to keep her own violin."

"It is not hers. She has stolen it. Where would such as she get such a violin?"

"At least she did not steal it from you. Leave her alone."

The man and the boy glared at each other for a moment. The boy was the taller of the two, and his straight, clean figure suggested the athlete, while there was not the slightest trace of faltering in his eye. Finally the man turned it off with a laugh. "Can you not see through a joke? I did but want to see how she would act. If she had stolen it, she would not have made a struggle to keep it. We do not wish to become entangled with the gendarmes. Come, let us return to the grand canal and gather some more silver berries."

They all knew that the man was lying, but as it was the easiest way out of it, they pretended to believe him, and returned to the grand canal and continued to play until the crowd broke up. When they returned to their landing-place, the leader was all kindness to Nachette and offered to accompany her to her lodging-place; but she refused, and as he saw it would be useless to insist, he told her to be sure to be at the same place early the next evening, wished her good-night, and started away.

"But her money—you have given her no money," said the boy, whose name was Toney.

"That is true," replied the man, affecting surprise. Then he took out a handful of coins, and, counting them, gave Nachette ten lire for her share.

The third man, who seldom spoke, had left the landing-place at once, and as Nachette stood wondering where she could pass the night, Toney walked up to her and said: "Little cousin, can I do aught for you?"

His frank, kindly tone gave her confidence, and

she told him that she did not know a soul in the city nor a place to lodge. He told her that he dwelt with his aunt, who took in lodgers, not a great way from their present location, and that if she would go with him he would see that she received proper treatment. As this was the only plan offered, she gratefully accepted it, and they walked along together, easily falling into conversation. He told her much about himself, but a gentle courtesy restrained him from asking her any questions.

He was only twenty, but had been supporting himself by his music for six years, and in the eyes of Nachette was possessed of a most desirable experience. She felt no fear of him, and told him that she had received good musical instruction but had never played in public until a few months before, that she was very anxious to get to Paris, and that she was fleeing from a man who had tried to get possession of her. She further told him that she feared the leader, and would not return on the following evening. Toney also said that he had decided to quit, and that if she were willing they would play together upon the canals until she had saved enough to take her to Paris. This proposition seemed a solution to her difficulties, and she promptly accepted it.

They were like old friends when they reached the home of Toney's aunt, and she treated Nachette with motherly kindness and made her comfortable at once.

There was another young musician stopping at the same house, a flute-player, and as he was in no other band Toney proposed that they take him with them. Nachette was willing, and next day she

began training her small orchestra. In the delight of moulding new harmonies and arrangements, the day passed pleasantly for Nachette, and her old hopefulness returned. Toney's instrument was a zither, and both the boys were proficient. When they started out in the evening they had half-a-dozen beautiful selections far above the Venetian average and many others fully equal to it. Nachette had told them that she did not wish to speak to a single person, and that if occasion demanded Toney was to say she had lost the power of speech through scarlet fever, which had also impaired her reasoning faculties.

They chose a field far removed from that of their old band and met with flattering success. When they returned Toney said that they would divide the returns into four parts, Nachette taking two and each of the others one, as she was easily the leader.

Day after day she followed this simple routine without molestation, until her carefully guarded hoard was becoming large enough to warrant her in making the journey to Paris. It had been arranged that Toney was to accompany her in the guise of brother, which would save her all details of the trip and give her a companion upon whom she could rely. A week passed thus, the fame of the little orchestra spreading among the tourists and arousing not a little jealousy among the other musicians.

It had been arranged that they would leave upon the following day, and they were giving their last series of concerts. Their constant practice had borne rich fruit, and the three played as one in a manner never before heard in the gondolas of

Venice. As each evening had succeeded its fellow without incident, Nachette had grown bolder and had allowed herself more and more freedom, so that upon this evening her violin was singing with all its old-time charm, and the encores and the silver showered upon the little orchestra.

She had not dared to telegraph to Clarice, but she had twice written, and the fact that she had received no answer was her chief cause for worry. She had given no details of her capture, but had merely said that she was in Venice without money and playing upon the canals in order to earn enough to take her to Paris. Ever and anon she would touch the tiny bag which held her meager earnings and was hung about her neck by a ribbon.

They were slowly floating along, playing softly a plaintive serenade, when without a moment's warning a swiftly moving gondola swept up to them, and one of its occupants grasped the gunwale and held the two boats together, while the other man reached forth and tried to wrest the violin from the hands of Nachette. She recognized the leader of the first band and gave a cry, which Toney immediately answered by springing to her rescue. Nachette clung tightly to her violin, and in the struggle the small sack containing her money came into view. Instantly the man, seeing no prospect of getting the instrument, loosened his hold upon it, and, seizing the sack, gave a push which separated the two gondolas, and his gondolier immediately made every exertion to escape. The two boats were going in opposite directions, and before the one in which Nachette was seated could put about the other was lost to sight.

They were close to a landing-place upon which an unusual crowd was standing, and Nachette asked Toney to land her at once and take her home, as she was utterly discouraged. As they approached the landing they noticed a slight commotion in the center of it, and just as they were about to land, a man pushed forward, lost his footing, and fell into the canal. As he was sinking, Nachette fancied that she heard him speak her name, and a terrible fear took possession of her. She was sure that this was one of the emissaries of the Prince, and she urged Toney to make all the haste possible.

They did not even pause to see whether or not the man got out safely, but hurried on to their lodging-house, Toney all the while muttering threats against his old leader. He well knew that the law offered him no recourse, and even feared that the leader himself might make use of it in an attempt to gain possession of Nachette's violin, which she guarded with such care and about which she had furnished no information.

When they reached the house Nachette was completely unstrung, and said that she would leave the city that very night. Her distress was so real that Toney said that he would see what he could do to aid her. He did not have sufficient funds for the journey himself, and left the house bidding her be of good cheer. He came back shortly, radiant with happiness, and told them that he had secured passage upon a small sailing-vessel which was that night going to Genoa.

As this would take her away from Venice and bring her nearer to Paris, Nachette was glad to accept the plan, and as soon as Toney could make his simple preparations they left and were soon on

board. As the small boat with its lanteen sails swung out of the harbor and the lights of Venice dropped behind, Nachette breathed more and more freely. It was a beautiful night. Every star seemed in its place, and as she had no desire for sleep, she and Toney took out their instruments and mingled their music with the soft lapping of the waves and the gentle murmuring of the breeze through the rigging.

After a time Nachette arose and went to the bow of the boat, where she leaned against the low bulwark and looked ahead. The placid calmness of the trip seemed to be like her own life for so many years, and she wondered if the boat were to meet with a fierce storm which would strive to tear it asunder before it reached its port.

Naturally she had a contented disposition, and as she looked back and saw that she had safely weathered each storm in her own life, a soothing peace came upon her, and seating herself with her back against a coil of rope, she wrapped about her the coarse shawl which Toney's aunt had given her and soon fell asleep. A little farther back sat Toney. All through the night his soft, deep eyes never left her, until the sun rose broad and red from out the misty sea.

CHAPTER XX

"AND now it is that I must for a short time leave you." The Professor was standing with his feet wide apart and his hands clasped behind his back, while Clarice and Romola Perucho sat with sad, anxious faces before him. "This little house, it will soon a home become, and when we come back she will much pleasant rest here find."

"Oh, I don't want you to go," said Clarice. "You have not the slightest idea where she is; you will just go wandering about, and if—and when I get word of her, I shall not even know where to send for you. Why, if you insist upon going, do you not take some one with you?"

"I do not wish to be all the time bothered by suggestions. Most every one that would be willing to go would be of the people they call practical. I do not like practical people, they bore me."

"Yes, but they could help you with suggestions and attend to details and write to me and keep me in touch with you."

"Yes, indeed, they would attend to details and make suggestions," said the little Professor with a dry smile. "And their suggestions would suffocate me, and their details would drive me wild, and when they would say, 'Why do you wish such and such a place to visit, or such and such a thing to

do?' I should of a truth feel like destroying their lifes. I cannot tell where I shall go, or why. I shall just keep my thoughts always upon my little lost song-bird, and when a strange tugging at my breast comes, I shall not ask of it why it comes or where from it comes; I shall just yield myself unto it and be drawn along, until at the farther end of the path I shall hear the voice of the violin I so well know, and we shall all three come back to you together."

Clarice did not argue; all too clearly she saw that this was no case in which reason had a part. Physically the little old man seemed to have been fading like a flower at the close of day. There was no pain, there were none of the signs of ill health, but his cheeks, though smooth and pink, were becoming more sunken and occasionally he tottered in his walk. But if the body had weakened, the soul had gained in strength. There was a dignity in the childlike simplicity of his expression which always made the eyes of Clarice fill with tears when she noted it. It was as though he had already done with the period of looking through a glass darkly and was even now seeing face to face. There was no doubt, there was little of questioning; generally his face bore the look of one who was in communion with the soul most in harmony with his own. It was only when he was questioned that the dignity of his perfect confidence seemed to rebuke his questioner.

They had taken a small house, and all arrangements for Clarice and the girl had been made. Romola had proved a good girl and was spending her time in earnest practice. Since the night of the Prince's disappearance Clarice had borne a

heavy burden of discouragement. It seemed that there was no one to trust. Jack was kind, and she could find no tangible testimony against him; but he had not given her perfect confidence in the matter of the veiled lady, and her first doubts had left an unremovable trace of suspicion; but in spite of all, she felt inclined to trust him.

Upon the morning of their appointment with the Prince Jack had come early. Together they had waited, and when noon arrived and no word came, they had made their investigation together and had come to the conclusion that there was no doubt that they had been deserted by the Prince, whether he was guilty or not. Jack had immediately left for Rome, and Clarice had also sent Bertrand there. Both were pledged to send word each day, and as she had ample financial provision, Clarice could offer no excuse for keeping the Professor against what he clearly looked upon as a call.

"Where will you go first?" she asked in a resigned voice.

"First to Pisa," answered the Professor without hesitation.

"And why?"

"Ah, thus it is with practical people; always they must the why of everything know. It does not even do for them to see that God has created the universe, they must first know why before they will believe it. Why does the bird choose this tree instead of that? Why does the opera start upon this note instead of another? I have heard the music, and as I listened I saw dimly the leaning tower, and I shall go to Pisa and see what message awaits me there. Good-by; you have the temper of a wasp, but in your bosom beats a true heart,

and I shall rejoice to see the joy-light in your eyes again. And good-by too, my little musician. Some day you will know the joys and the sorrows which grow high upon the mountain, but for a little while rest you here with this good woman, and if you keep your heart open you can learn of her many things."

There was little ceremony about his farewell; he left them as though to keep an appointment, and the dreamy reverie in his eyes held not a trace of worry or doubt. On the train he sat contentedly looking out of the window, humming little snatches of music, while a happy smile wreathed his queer little face, the depth and tenderness of which could only be read by those who had known him long and well.

He alighted at Pisa and went straight to the hotel. As he was eating dinner he suddenly looked up and asked the waiter if he had heard aught of a lady who played with wonderful sweetness upon the violin.

"Why, yes," answered the waiter. "It was but recently that a lady played upon the balcony in such a manner that the other guests discussed it for several days."

"Ah, that is good! And did you hear yourself the playing?"

"No; it was at night and I had gone home, but young Pietro, the upper hall-boy, heard it, and he says it was a marvel surpassing all other music. Pietro himself does play upon the mandolin and upon the flute, and he has a clever ear."

"Yes, he has the good ear; I shall talk to him. Mayhap his ear has done him the service which is to make him for life. The world has need for these

good ears, they must not be wasted. Here ist ein venig trinkgeld, and when you spend it remember that he who gave it thee was the man who first knew how wonderful was the playing that the boy Pietro so fitly appreciated."

Without wasting a moment the Professor sought his room and sent for Pietro. He was a slight boy with large, soft eyes and long, slender fingers which were never quiet.

"Tell me of the music which was played by the lady that night upon the balcony."

There was but one lady; there was but one night. Without a moment's hesitation the boy answered: "Oh, the beauty of it! I sat upon the floor by the window and seemed to have risen to paradise in a vision. It was not like the playing of an instrument; each tone was a word, and while one could not understand them all, one could feel that they told of journeys which the soul takes when it leaves the body behind. You know how it is, but I cannot tell you. When one stands at night and gazes up into the stars, one cannot tell what it is that seems to lift and tug and draw him up and up until he scarce seems to touch the earth at all."

"Yes, that was she. And you are one of us. I knew exactly how it would be—wherever she went there would be some one who would know that she was a high priestess and who would also in her sacrifice share, and the memory of it would remain so that when I came they would tell it me and I could soon find her. Where is she now?"

"She went to Venice."

"Ah, yes, there is much that is beautiful in Venice. I shall go to Venice. Was she alone—was she looking well?"

"She was with one lady and two gentlemen, but her face I did not see."

"That is all, my son. I shall not forget you. When I find her I shall tell her of you, and she will make your path easy. It is a wonderful gift, a good ear, but also if you would climb to the highest levels, keep likewise your heart good. It is very terrible when a vile thing is made beautiful."

The Professor was soon lost in peaceful slumber, and in his dreams he saw the canals of Venice, gay with decorated gondolas and throbbing to the sound of countless instruments, which all at once hushed to a solemn stillness as the clear, sweet tones of a violin rose above the medley. On and on played the violin, and as the morning sun crept in through the open window it fell upon the quiet face of the old man, and found it bright with a smile of perfect joy.

When he arrived at Venice he immediately asked if there was a great violinist in the city. He was told of several, but hastened to explain that he meant a young lady who had only been there a few days. His look of surprise when told that there was no newcomer attracting especial attention was so comical that he was made the unconscious butt of numerous jokes, but reached his hotel filled only with gentle pity at the condition of the unfortunate Venetians. His inquiries there brought him no information, and in the evening he took a gondola and made a tour of the canals without learning any encouraging news.

Next night he went from concert-hall to concert-hall, visited the other hotels, and even spoke to some of the strolling musicians, but none had heard of a strange lady who played after the manner of

the Professor's description. He was not discouraged, he was only mildly disappointed, and continued his impulsive searching with ear ever strained to catch the first whisper of the violin he knew so well.

On his third night he wandered into a dark and gloomy section and was drawn into conversation by a young woman, handsome and showily dressed and possessing manners which were easy rather than conventional. She asked the Professor to buy her some wine, and he absent-mindedly complied. They went together to a low-grade wine-shop, the old man with his dreamy, childlike face and the girl with her hard, worldly one. He did not know that she had a hard face; he asked her simple questions and called her "My child," and when she had drunk her wine inquired if she needed money for a lodging.

The girl looked at him with a quizzical look and said that she needed money for everything there was in the world. The Professor smiled good-naturedly at this and gave her some homely advice upon the advantages of cultivating habits of industry and thrift. His innocence was a source of much amusement to her and she humored him. She made ambiguous answers, the coarse suggestions of which were entirely lost upon him, but added much to the amusement of the waiter.

When she tried to induce him to buy more wine, he refused and mildly reproved her for indulging herself in more than one bottle of wine during the day. He offered to take her to her home or to a lodging-house where he was perfectly willing to pay for her entertainment. She finally agreed to this, and as they walked along the street she tried

to arouse him by flattery and all the other wiles at her command, but for a long time he did not suspect her. His mind was alert for a different message, and the words of the girl fell upon unresponsive ears.

At last she saw that there was no guile in the old man's heart, and as they paused upon a corner she kept up a lively talk, while with deft hands she took his watch from his pocket. He did not suspect her, but something impelled him to glance down and he caught the gleam of it as she thrust it into her dress. He felt in his pocket and his watch was gone. They were standing where the light fell full upon her face, and he looked into her eyes in hurt inquiry.

Slowly the dull red mounted to her cheek, while her eyes fell. It was long since she had blushed before, and the sensation was nearly as overpowering as her first blush had been. He did not speak to her, but in a moment she had taken the watch from her dress and had handed it to him.

"This watch it was to me a present—it was giffen by a girl, the greatest violinist of the age—of any age. To you it was worth but little; to me it means more than all the money of the world. Do you not consider what you may do when you take away a piece of jewelry? The keepsake of a dear friend—ah, it can never be replaced!"

"I need money—I always need money. I don't care how I get it. Now don't start to preach. I'd sooner you arrested me at first and have it over."

"I shall not have you arrested. You have giffen me back my watch, and you are sorry that you took it. You do care. You started life as a woman, and always, so long as you keep life, you will also

the gifts of your soul keep. You cannot destroy them utterly, even to gain the hardness which will take, in a measure, the place of peace. It is even the same with a violin: one may bruise it and mar it, but it still gives forth the true tone to the right touch. I offered you money, I shall give to you all I have with me, but I wish that you would promise me never again a keepsake to take. This watch, it is part of my life."

They were walking on again, and a tumult of emotion was beating at the breast of the girl. She had supposed that she knew all there was to learn of man, but here was one who seemed to come from another sphere. He did not yield to her, he did not reproach her, he did not revile nor threaten her. He treated her as though she was worthy of respect, and a deep yearning filled her breast to be honestly entitled to this respect. Over and over her mind repeated his words, "It still gives forth the true tone to the right touch." Oh, if only there had never been the wrong touch in her life! She had thought that she had stamped out the feminine side of her nature; she had wept when she had torn it from her bosom, but she had given up hope and wanted only the allurement, not the pride of sex; and yet when this old man had given the right touch she had responded with the true tone.

Softly the tears flowed down her cheeks, and soon she was telling him her story—her old, sad, simple story, which, with slight variation, is told by the girls of the street the whole cruel world around. He did not interrupt her, but when she had finished he stroked her head and said softly: "Once a musician was wrecked among the savages, but he saved his violin and he played upon it the beautiful

music. The chief thought a great spirit must be within the violin held captive, and he took the violin and destroyed it, trying to get the beautiful spirit." The old man paused and looked at her. "Man is but a savage. He is not content to thrill to the beauty of woman, he must tear her apart, he must crush her in his rude hands; and then when she is broken and can no longer give forth the same clear, wonderful notes as at first, he casts her aside and seeks another. But, my poor little wanderer, there is a way to repair every wrong; the broken bits may all be fastened together, and a musician will take them and play upon them the sweet melodies of love and the tender cradle-songs of home. There are few violins which have not needed to be repaired, and it is worth every care when once the violin is patched and can again soothe the weary heart and lift the clouds of sorrow."

"Oh, I have been too badly broken; there is no repair for me. I—you cannot even imagine how bad I have been."

"Well, I shall not try. I shall think when I remember you, how loving you once were, and what a grand, beautiful life you might have lived, and I shall hope that you have tried to start anew. What did you do? You came to this world with love in your heart, as I came to you with my watch; and the world took your love as you took my watch, but the world was not so kind as you, for you gave back the watch. Then if the world still hopes for pardon, why shall you be beyond it? Listen: suppose a grand violin were lost, the strings torn off, and the polish rubbed away, and then some children found it and used it to scoop filth from the gutter—would that make it a hateful thing to the mas-

ter? Ah, no, he would take it tenderly and clean it, and bind it with glue and polish it, and put on new strings, and hold it up to the world, and say, 'Behold, I have found a great treasure.'"

"And if I told you that I intended to try again, would you believe me?"

"I should believe you, and also I should say that the battle was already half won. I shall help you."

"Then I shall try. Is there anything that I can do to help you?"

There was a wistfulness in the girl's tone which denoted earnestness. Of all life's mysteries there is none more apparent nor less understood than the peculiar one of personal attraction. It is not the words, but the speaker; it is not the deed, but the doer. How often one meets a stranger who at a glance becomes an old friend, who completes a circle as it were and fills one with a sense of strength and harmony! Our souls gather strength from sources we cannot fathom, even as the unseen roots of a plant seek out the rich elements with which to form its fruit. And this strong young woman found in the feeble old Professor that mystic nourishment which would give her strength to win the battle which had gone so long against her.

For a few moments they walked on in silence, and then he said, with a glad light in his eyes: "Why, of course—you the very person are. I am looking for a girl, a young girl like you. She plays with a wonderful skill upon the violin. Here in this very city was she but a few days since, but whether of her own will or through evil influence, that I cannot tell. You must help me find her, and she will help you to win your birth-right back once more."

She eagerly asked the questions which he gladly answered. He described Nachette and her wonderful playing, but did not mention her name; and after giving her money, telling her his address, and learning from her the shortest way to it, they parted. He stood still as she walked rapidly away with shoulders slightly drawn together and head bent forward, as though once again the woman's soul dreaded the look from the stranger's eyes. "The sweet melodies of love and the tender cradle-songs of home," murmured the Professor. "Ah, it will a thorny path be; but when she climbs a little higher she will see the light shining in the window for her and will no longer the bitter loneliness feel. Poor little lost child—she has missed her way; but it is not too late—it is neffer too late. Nachette shall take her for her maid until the wounds be healed."

Next evening, as he stood in the door of his hotel debating the best plan for pursuing his evening's search, he saw a woman with a light shawl about her head come rapidly up the street and, pausing at the foot of the steps, look up at him meaningly. In a moment he recognized the girl he had befriended, and hastened down to grasp her by the hand. "I have heard of her," she said.

"This was the goot God's way to show you that you were forgiffen," said the old man kindly. "Where is she?"

"She and two other musicians play each evening at the Garriano Landing, after which they play in a gondola, returning to the Garriano when the night's profits are gathered."

"Ah, this is goot news—some poor musicians whom she has befriended, I suppose. She had ever

the kindly heart. Come, child, we shall go together, and when you have seen her you will feel neffer again the discouragement. Her mouth is strong and sweet, and in her eyes a great sympathy is ever looking forth. This is why all the little notes come running joyously at her bidding, like the glad pages who wait upon a gentle queen. She will not preach, she will not a single question ask; she will just look into your eyes, and you will tell her your story, and she will take her violin and play it, and then she will have her violin tell you of the flowers of joy, and the cooling shade beneath the pleasant tree of duty, and all the calm delights which one may find in the vales of the country of peace."

Proud and happy was the face of the little Professor as he stepped up the street in a stride which was meant to be strong and confident, but which occasionally halted through a physical weakness which he absolutely refused to indulge. As he walked he chattered with the rambling enthusiasm of a child out for a pleasure-trip. He bragged of his former successes in a frank, hearty tone, which bore no shadow of gloating but was more like the spreading of a feast at which he bade his listener join. She humored him, asking him questions, begging for details, becoming demonstrative at his climaxes, and furnishing the receptive audience which is the necessary complement to the speaker.

Finally they reached the landing, but not until after the busier hours, and there were few idlers and no musicians there. They stood close to the water, and the old man no longer spoke. As the soft tones of distant music floated in toward him, he strained his ear to catch and to analyze them.

With head turned to one side, giving the quaint suggestion of a small bird, he stood with half-parted lips, his whole being concentrated into the effort to catch the first faint strain from the hand he loved so well.

As he stood thus, an oddly matched pair approached, the one short and stout, the second tall and ungainly. They eyed the little Professor for a time as they talked to each other in low tones, and then, while the taller strove to engage him in conversation, the shorter closely scanned the manner in which his watch was fastened. The girl did not appear to be watching; but just as the hand of the shorter had shot forth, she gave a peculiar cough and looked him full in the face. He dropped his hand and gave her a knowing wink, but as her face remained cold and threatening, he walked carelessly to the farther end of the landing, where he was soon joined by his tall companion.

As they fell into a subdued conversation, the girl dropped back to her former position, and continued her quiet but faithful guardianship of the old Professor, who, all unconscious of any evil, was gazing with dreamy eyes up the still waters of the canal and listening for the message his soul already seemed to be hearing. To the girl it seemed that he was listening for the voice which was to call her into her new life; and thus they stood beneath the stars, while as the night floated past, the gondolas drew up to the landing-place and began to unload their passengers.

CHAPTER XXI

"WHY did you not take the watch?" asked Luigi.

"Did you not see the girl, stupid?" answered Beppo in a low tone.

"You know that whenever the chance to see a girl arises I do not miss my opportunity; but what has this one to do with the watch?"

"She is a wise one, and she probably wants the watch for herself."

"Why, then, does she not take it and be off? The old one is lost in the stars. Does she expect him to take it out and hand it to her?"

"How can I know what she thinks or what her game is? Always you insist upon asking questions. Go you and ask her for a full account of her plans and hopes."

"I shall first wait and see if she gets the watch. A girl is not at all times a profitable addition to a man's equipment; but if she can pick watches as a child plucks oranges from a tree, I should be not unwilling to teach her the pleasures of love. Have you ever been arrested in Venice?"

"By all the saints, I wish your brain had a faucet, so that I might turn it off and spare myself this flood of questions. If you do not mend your ways I shall leave you alone to starve."

"The first meal-hour would not knock at my

door in vain before you would be there yourself asking my assistance. When our reward was lost at the table, did you leave me to starve? Nay, you besought me to throw the man from the bridge so that you might have time to escape with his wallet. There be many bridges in this town, why can we not throw yet other men from them? This little one, methinks, could be thrown clear across this ditch."

Beppo pouted in silence, and Luigi fell to whistling a love-tune while he eyed the girl in languorous boldness. She paid no heed to him, and next his gaze fell in study upon the little Professor. He watched him some time as he stood in rapt attention that took no heed of the crowd which was coming and going upon the landing-place.

"What can that little owl of a man be thinking of?" he finally asked Beppo. "He never looks at anyone, but seems to be listening for fairies. You should have taken the watch. Methinks one could remove his clothes and him be none the wiser. Mayhap his mind is no longer present and his daughter is also his keeper. But no," he continued in answer to his own query, "this maid is no daughter of his. As good claim would the ferret have who accused the lap-dog of paternity. I vow she has not lost *her* mind. I would that she hasten this business of the watch, as I am beginning to have a fancy for her."

At this moment the Professor clasped his hands and gave a little gasping cry. The girl was at his side on the instant, her close sympathy telling her that he had heard the sound for which both had so long waited. She could not hear anything new or strange stand out with prominence from the mellow harmony which was wafted in on the breeze, but

the agitation of her new friend showed plainly enough that his ear had caught the tone. "What do you hear?" she asked breathlessly.

"And can you not hear it?" he replied in surprise. "It is the violin, and she is playing it—she is playing it! Ah, soon I shall see her again! God is goot—God is ferry kind to an olt man."

And again the three listened. "What do you think of that?" whispered Luigi. "This ancient owl does have a desire for yet other maidens. Of a truth this is a marvelous world—and he looks fit for his grave, too. Shall we not take his watch and be off? He will soon be so surrounded by girls that he will be lost to view."

Beppo did not reply; he kept his gaze fastened upon the changing face of the old man and the eager, sympathetic one of the girl. He had not given up his intentions concerning the watch, but he had become interested in the dramatic little pantomime which was being carried on before him. The old man raised his hand unconsciously and beat time with airy grace, and as the slender fingers seemed to trace a delicate fretwork upon the air, the tune which he was following stood out from its fellows and they all recognized it.

Clearly and more clearly the music from a single violin rose into the air, until one by one the other musicians stopped and themselves joined in the hushed group of listeners. The lips of the old man moved, but there was no sound from them; the tears rolled down his cheeks, but he did not press his lids together to stay them; he had forgotten himself—the day of his waiting was over, and he was about to meet the girl who had become all that life held to attract him.

"Yonder violin is not ill played," murmured Luigi in the unwilling ear of his comrade. "If we were still searching for the maid with the peculiar name, I should say that this were no bad place to make an investigation. I am sorry we ever found that maid; never before did I have honest occupation that was not irksome. We were foolish to slay the goose that laid the golden egg. It would have been a simple matter to put her in the care of old mother Paginaro, and then we could have continued to hunt for her the balance of——"

Luigi's voice having risen above a whisper, and Beppo's patience having reached its uttermost limits, he put a hand over the former's mouth, and together they edged closer to the old man, for the gathering crowd had forced them slightly apart. As the music drew closer to the landing, the violin retired deeper within the harmony of its two supporting instruments, and the Professor leaned forward until his eyes could detect the gondola in which it rested. He saw the strange gondola dart out from the crowd, pause for a moment, and then go back in the direction from which the one he was watching had come. He saw this one start as though to turn, and he gave a little cry of protest, which was changed into an expression of joy as it once more headed toward the landing.

Closer and closer came the gondola, and tighter and tighter pressed the crowd, anxious to see the player who had drawn such wonderful music from the violin. Finally the boat touched the landing-place, the Professor caught sight of the girl who held the violin, and the heavy veil she wore was no screen to his loving glance. He stepped forward as though to enter the gondola, missed his footing,

and as he fell gave one feeble cry, "Nachette!" And then the waters closed above his head.

"There goes our watch," said Luigi in tones of calm pessimism.

"Did you catch the name he uttered as he sank?" asked Beppo excitedly.

"I had no time to catch anything, he took me so by surprise. I had no idea that a man of his years would do so foolish a thing. If I had had the chance to catch anything, however, it would have been his watch and not——"

"There he is!" interposed Beppo. "See—yonder bit of white is his hair. Quick—jump in and save him."

"Of course it will be I who will jump in and save him; and then when I bring him to the land, you will step forward and take him from my arms and hold him up and say: 'Behold, see the man which I have saved from the deep!' while I may shiver myself dry. Some gondola will pick him up; he is naught——"

The faint, floating speck was drifting farther from shore, and without further argument Beppo gave his garrulous associate a push which carried him well into the water. Once thoroughly wet, Luigi had no objection to saving the life of the little Professor, and soon swam to the landing-place with him. Many hands were outstretched to them, but Beppo managed to be the one who took the shrunken form, which looked even more frail in its dripping clothing.

"Quick!" he exclaimed with fine impartiality. "A litter, and something hot to drink. Back—give him air until I can bring him to."

Luigi stood at one side shaking his head in un-

willing admiration of the executive ability of his leader. "Ah, well," he said to himself finally, "it takes more than one kind of a man to form a strong union. Signor Beppo has the body and the glory all right, but I myself shall look after the watch until this excitement dies away."

In due time the Professor was breathing regularly once more, but he had not recovered consciousness when the litter arrived. A sharp battle of glances took place between Beppo and the girl, who wiped the water from the poor, tired face and did her utmost to assist. When the litter drew up Beppo motioned Luigi to lift the feet, and they placed the old man upon it; but when the girl tried to make him more comfortable Beppo thrust her back with force. "Why do you crowd yourself forward so?" he demanded.

"He is my friend," answered the girl simply.

"I cannot believe it; what is his name?"

The girl hesitated, blushing, and then answered with unfaltering eyes: "I do not know his name, but he is my friend."

"Begone! You are no friend of his at all. I take you for a woman of the street. If you bother me more I shall call a gendarme."

The eyes of the girl fell. Too well she knew that the signs of the street were still upon her, and she dropped back a space. "At least I shall go with you to his hotel and shall help to nurse him."

"If you know him at all, tell me where his hotel is."

"He is stopping at the Continental. He is my friend."

At this moment the lips of the stricken Professor were seen to move; and bending low, Beppo caught once more the name, "Nachette, Nachette!"

"He shall not go to the Continental," he exclaimed. "He shall go to our own lodgings. Carry on."

"Where to?" asked the man who stood at the head of the litter.

"Never mind," answered Beppo shortly. As the man stared at him in amazement he continued: "Just carry him out of the crowd, and then I shall show you the way."

"And the pay?" asked the man doubtfully as he scanned Beppo's rough dress.

"Pay!" exclaimed Beppo in a low, fierce voice. "Never mind the pay—bear on."

The men took up their burden and started in the wake of the two adventurers. Finally, the man in front again asked the address, and after a moment's thought Beppo gave him one.

"I also am glad to learn it," said Luigi. "Until this moment I did not know that we had lodgings in this town. But would I be answered if I asked you why we want this ancient man? If we had to have either, I should prefer the maid. She has a comely face; but what profit we shall get from him, I cannot fathom. I already have in my pocket the watch and what little change he had."

"Put it back—put it back at once. Can't you control your thievish ways for a few short minutes? But no; the change give to me, as we may need it at the lodging-house."

"Oh, no," said Luigi with dry sarcasm, after he had returned the watch under the pretense of seeing if the heart were still beating, "let us buy bread with it to give to the poor. What need have such as we for food and drink?"

"Fool! This man is one of those who helped to

steal Nachette. Thrice have I heard him speak her name. We shall take him to Paris and get more reward."

"He steal the girl we sent to Paris—that fine brave maid who laughed at silver and gold and marriage and held herself for the highest price of all? This tiny trinket of a man could not steal one of her shoes. You have been fooled by your own desires. And yet there seemed to be much money where that other came from. It might be a good thing to show that we were still willing, and at least they would pay our expenses and a trifle more. Yes, I consent to making the trip to Paris. As soon as we get him to bed we shall stroll forth and drop some man from a bridge and get the money for our tickets. What think you of this other girl who hovered about him? Is she part of his gang, or does he steal them by blinding their eyes with a charm?"

"We shall find out many things when we bring this old man to. Now be still while I turn over all that took place in my mind."

They walked swiftly through the narrow streets, and Luigi, after maintaining a troubled silence for many minutes, said: "It must be an affliction to have a great mind. I suppose if one cooked upon a stove a rod square and wished his cake to touch every part, it would take a deal of turning; but as for me, I prefer to cook on a small griddle and turn once and have it over. I have turned this thing many times in my own mind, but I still think that the watch is the only part of this man worth the carrying home. It is a good watch, with much gold and five diamonds in the case of it. Next to the watch I should choose the girl. I never had a great

fondness for men, and this one seems more useless than most; still, a trip to Paris has a pleasant sound, and as we are to get them back with interest there will be small need to shade the expenses. If I but had some dry clothing to make a change, no doubt I should be able to see much joy in our——"

"I swear by my soul that at times I wish you had no mind at all. Your body I contrive to make use of, but your Creator himself could not find use for such a mind as yours."

"That is not so easily answered," said Luigi, glad to receive enough attention to warrant his starting an argument. "You judge the world only after the manner in which it serves you; but it is a large world, and it may be that the Creator of it had other matters to consider besides your own desires. It would not surprise me at all to learn that my mind was well adapted to the station in life which my body was supposed to fill; but when I left my simple occupation of caring for the men who were overcome by wine at the shop of Luigi, my uncle, and joined myself with you, I soared above my station, and this is the fault neither of my mind nor of my Creator. When the moment of action arrives, I do not ask questions, I do promptly that thing which I am directed to do; but when all is quiet again, it gives me pleasure to know in what way my deed has profited——"

"Monkey! If you cannot cease your chattering I shall run off and leave you with the old man on your hands. The words come gushing forth from your mouth until they whirl my head about as the swollen race turns the mill-wheel."

"At least," growled Luigi, giving his last word

grudgingly, "when the mill grinds it brings a profit to the miller, while I get little for my pains save the exercise to my own powers of speech."

They finally drew up at a dark and gloomy lodging-house. Beppo knocked at the door, and soon made a bargain with the disreputable man who opened it.

A stiff argument ensued before Beppo and the men with the litter had come to terms, but as they finally grew loud he paid them, and in a moment they had seated the poor Professor upon the doorstep and had started off up the street. Beppo called after them angrily, and Luigi said: "Mayhap I had better go and bump their heads together."

"Let them go; we must get this old man to bed. His room is on the third floor."

"He cannot stand—how do you expect him to climb two flights?"

Beppo merely looked at his larger associate, and as it did not have the desired effect, he said shortly, "You are already wet."

"Of a truth you are correct," answered Luigi. "It was very careless of me to slip into the canal, but accidents will happen. Well, then, old man, as long as we have formed ourselves into a charitable institution, I may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb."

Picking the little Professor up in his arms, and grumbling at every step, Luigi carried him up to the small back room and deposited him upon the dirty bed. After he had been undressed and wrapped in a blanket, Beppo turned to Luigi and said, "You had better hasten to the Continental and get his baggage."

"That will be simple," answered Luigi, who had

removed his shirt and was wringing the water from it. "I have only to learn which room he had and steal it, for as yet we know not the name or the station of this man whose life you have saved."

"Well, then, you can wait until he is able to tell it."

They poured some warm liquor down the Professor's throat, and after a few minutes he opened his eyes and asked: "Where did she go—where is Nachette?"

"She is in Paris. We were sent to warn you to be more careful, as you have been traced to Venice," answered Beppo.

The old man looked at Beppo in surprise. "In Paris—you have been sent to warn me? Why should they trace me—and who?"

"It will all come back to you in a moment. They are after you on account of the part you took in the abduction of Nachette. We are your friends, you can tell us everything."

The Professor stared at him with dull eyes for a moment, and then closed them and said weakly: "I am still delirious; it is not credible that any one could even jest upon such an impossibility. Why, more than my life I love her, and I thought that I had found her. I shall come out of this vision soon."

Luigi plucked at the sleeves of his companion. "He is not one of the gang that took her; he is one who has been trying to find her. Now, then, what good is he since we ourselves have found her and have already lost the reward in striving to double it? Let us take the watch and be on our way."

"Where is Nachette—where is she?" murmured the old man.

"She is in Paris—we ourselves sent her," Luigi blurted out before Beppo could interpose.

The transformation in the feeble old man was wonderful. He sat up and looked eagerly into their eyes. "When—when did you send her?"

"First tell us who you are and what you know about Nachette," said Beppo.

"I am the Professor Brahmfelder—I am the discoverer of Nachette. Now tell me what you know of her."

While Beppo was pondering the situation, Luigi asked, "Did you ever hear of him they call Bertrand?"

"Yes, yes; he is a good man. He searched for her with great diligence, but made a mistake. He sent one much like her to us, but she was not the real Nachette. What know you of all this?"

"We are the men who found that Nachette which Bertrand did send to Paris. And you say that this was not the right one? They paid us our reward," said Beppo.

"Yes, and it was taken from us by those who pretended to be our friends," continued Luigi.

"You—you are the two assistants of Bertrand? Ah, God is still goot! Listen: to-night I heard her—heard her playing upon her violin down there at the landing. I waited with my heart scarce beating, while close and ever closer she came the landing to, and then, just as the gondola was landing, my balance I lost and into the water I fell. Did you see where she went? You will find her, will you not? She played with two others—young men; the one upon the flute and the other upon the zither played. You can easily find them. Bertrand has told us that you were men who wonderful discernment had. You will go now, at once, and find her—nicht var?"

"Yes, of a truth we shall find her. We had doubtless done so long ago had we known that the one we sent to Paris was not the right one. Who is this girl who was with you at the landing-place?" asked Beppo.

"Ah, yes, poor child, I must not forget her; where did she go? I want Nachette to take care of her; she has much need of a true friend. When will you start to seek Nachette?"

"Now, at once," answered Beppo without hesitation; and then, turning to his assistant, he continued: "Go you and learn the dwelling of the girl who played upon the violin. Doubtless it will be at the same place as that of the players upon the flute and the zither."

"Certainly—doubtless—of course! What could be easier than for me to run out in this little village and find a young girl whom I have never seen? Shall I fetch her back with me, or is it sufficient simply to locate her abode?" Luigi leaned forward and gazed at his chief with a grave, solicitous face.

"Oh, bring her here, bring her here at once!" cried the little Professor.

Luigi bowed with patronizing assent, and after he had left the room the Professor said, half to himself: "They are wonderful men—wonderful! They seem to wind in and out of a city finding whom they seek, even as the musician wanders through the notes and at the end the beautiful selection has been performed."

Beppo nodded with indulgent complacency, and presently the old man sank into a heavy slumber. After a time Luigi returned, picking his teeth with unnecessary ostentation. However, as this failed to attract the attention he desired, he dusted off

the seat of a rickety chair, put his feet comfortably upon a corresponding table, and after he had rolled a cigarette and had taken the first refreshing puff, he said casually: "My uncle was a great philosopher. albeit he made more money and even more fame, I am thinking, at his profession, which was the purchasing of low-priced wines and the selling of them at a handsome profit. As the keeper of a wine-shop he was a devout Christian, but as a philosopher he was a pagan and asked no favor of any saint at all. He used to say that while he was willing to admit that there was some sort of a crude plan in the arrangement of the affairs of this world, about the only happenings really worth while were accidents. He said that if one take the life of a race or of a nation, or even of a man himself, what he seemed to set out to do seldom amounted to as much as some little thing that just fell against him as it were, and turned him from his own path into a new and more——"

"Is there apt to be any end to the path your tongue is now treading, or do you intend to sit there and emit words without meaning, as a flowering vine sends forth a mild and savorless perfume?" interrupted Beppo.

"If a man should plant an olive pit and should then go forth the next day and gaze upon the spot and say, 'I think but little of the fruit of this olive tree,' he would much resemble the man who expected to be able to decide upon the value of a discourse by the importance of its first few words. I myself——"

"You yourself are ever in the midst of a discourse, but if it has ever yielded fruit I have not been able to gather it."

"That is what the man said to the palm tree after he had tried to eat the cocoanut without taking off its husk or shell. If the ocean were a vast caldron of wine it would strengthen no man save only he should drink and refresh himself. As I was about to remark——"

"Now listen, I beseech you: if you have aught to say, say it in peace; but there is no need to swathe a small thought in such costly robes. Your uncle the philosopher may have had such store of wisdom that it would profit a man to glean something from each phrase; but you are no philosopher, and I have not the time to screen a ton of ashes in order to find a pint of coal. I have matters of importance to turn over in my mind."

"Your mind is like the sea—forever turning something over; yet if a man desired aught in a hurry, he would not search the bed of the sea to find it. What I wanted to lead up to——"

"It matters not what you wanted to lead up to," said Beppo in wrath, "but if you do not either say something or nothing, you will lead me into insanity. What is on your mind? Tell it at once."

"Well," remarked Luigi with maddening composure, "you have ofttimes seemed to hint that my intelligence was of a low order, yet but a short time since you sent me forth to make a discovery. I did not come back with boastfulness, nor much speech about having done great things, yet in my own way——"

"What have you heard? Speak! Do you know the whereabouts of Nachette?"

"That is the thing which I have done. I know where Nachette is."

The Professor's will.

(Page 252)

CHAPTER XXII

THE excited tones of Beppo as he put his last question had aroused the slumbering Professor, and as he raised himself upon his elbow at Luigi's answer, both he and Beppo exclaimed, "Nachette—where is she?"

Luigi was rolling another cigarette, and the question came just at the critical point when the tiny roll must be sealed by the lip and tongue. He felt and enjoyed the strength of his position, and while his features remained composed and sedate, a brighter gleam came into his eyes. Finally he took the delightful first puff and then answered, "She is upon a boat, sailing to Genoa."

The Professor sank back, and Beppo struck his palm with his fist and uttered an oath of stupendous proportions. "Why did you not stop her?" he asked.

"Unfortunately, she had left before I knew that she was going."

"Then how did you discover whither she had gone?"

"The maid who was with the Professor did find it out, and I took the word of the maid."

"Where is she?"

"She waits below. I told her that as a reward for being clever I should ask you to allow her to see this ancient man, and help to nurse him."

"Let her in—let her in at once," said the Professor.

As soon as Luigi returned with the girl, the Professor began to ask her questions concerning Nachette; but all that she knew was that when they refused to permit her to accompany them, she had decided that it would be best for her to tell Nachette that he was in trouble. She had had some difficulty in finding her, and she was already on her way to the boat when she finally succeeded. She was known to Toney, who had warned her off as soon as she attempted to speak, and all she could do was to learn of the objective point of the boat. She had recalled the remark which the Professor had made concerning his ignorance as to whether Nachette was in the city through her own choice or was held there, and had not dared to force herself forward for fear of arousing suspicion.

"Genoa—Genoa," muttered the old man. "It is only a day distant, but I fear I shall never reach it."

"It luckily happens that we are not at present engaged, and if you wish our services they are at your disposal," said Beppo.

"Oh, yes, above all things, and also the services of that honest man Bertrand; but I fear that I myself my little part have played. I am very tired and can go no farther. Give me a paper and some ink, that a short letter to Clarice I may write. I am very tired."

Beppo made a sign to Luigi, who arose with a sigh and left in search of writing materials. He soon returned, and after a painful effort the Professor succeeded in finishing his letter of instructions. "It is indeed my will, and I desire that you

witness it." Beppo signed his name with a flourish, and turning to Luigi said, "Can you write?"

"Can I write? What think you I am—a crow or a field-mouse?"

"Never mind, I have known greater men than you who could not."

"Yes," answered Luigi, "and I have known greater than you who could. But my own education was not neglected; for the better part of three winters I attended school with earnest diligence. My uncle always thought——"

"Then I wish that you would follow in the footsteps of your uncle; but instead you never think, but always talk. I did not invite you to make an oration, I merely asked you a question. If you can write, do so, and let us get to more important things."

"I suppose that means that you have found something new to turn over in that wonderful mind of yours. Very well, I shall now write. But this is a vile pen! See how it stumbles across the paper, kicking the ink before it like a young child crossing a muddy street. I love to write a fair, large hand, which may the more easily be read; for, after all, what is the good of writing if it cannot be read when he who wrote it is no longer present? But if I had the job to do anew, I should have started a bit smaller, so that it might all have gone in one straight line and not have to climb the side of the paper like a flock of goats going up the face of a cliff. And yet it presents no such an ill appearance for all——"

"Now if there is anything more to be said about the writing of your name, write also that which remains; and when there is naught else to do, I shall

read it. Have you anything more to order, Signor Professor?"

"Yes; mail this letter and get me a bit of paper, that I may a telegram write."

Beppo handed him a sheet of paper, and while he was writing the telegram, read the short letter which Professor Brahmfelder regarded as his will:

I, Professor Frederick Wilhelm Brahmfelder, being close to the end of my journey, but, by the grace of our Father, of a sound mind and memory, do hereby my last will and testament leave. Nachette is to have whatsoever of mine she may desire, and the rest to be disposed of as she may direct.

I desire that when she again her true place takes, she will the great Bertrand her manager make.

I desire that she take care of Pietro, the hall-boy at the Hotel Francois at Pisa, and also of the girl Rosiano, who is a good girl but has a hard time had.

Also, I suggest that the services of Beppo and Luigi, who have such good work done, be not forgotten.

And now when I am no longer among you in the flesh, think of me with much kindliness, for still in the spirit shall I come to commune with you. There is no cause to sorrow when the dusk of even falls, for it is sweet to rest after the heat of day.

(Signed) Prof. Frederick Wilhelm Brahmfelder.
(Witnessed by) Beppo Weanjo.
Luigi Poanario.

The telegram read: "She has gone to Genoa by boat. Send Bertrand there at once."

"At my hotel I have some drafts. I shall an order for my baggage write, and when you bring it I shall sign the drafts so that you may have some expense money."

He wrote the order, and Luigi hastened for the

baggage. Beppo in the meantime had taken the opportunity to write a telegram more to his liking. It read: "I have seen her in Venice; send Bertrand here at once. BRAHMFELDER."

"Now then, as soon as the sad event happens I shall hasten to send this," said Beppo. He was about to throw the first telegram away, but instead thrust it into his pocket. "After all, he may fool us yet. He is of a great age, and one can never tell what whim will next strike an old person."

The Professor had once more fallen asleep, and when Luigi returned with the baggage Beppo started to waken him. "Oh, let him sleep," said the girl, who had been quietly sitting at the side of the old man's bed, softly stroking his broad, smooth brow whenever he seemed disturbed. "Let him sleep; it is what he needs most of all."

"He must first finish the arrangements, and then he can sleep," said Beppo.

"Yes, then he can sleep," echoed Luigi, twirling his thumbs and gazing dreamily at the ceiling.

The girl made no further protest, but her bright, sad eyes were keenly alert to every movement. It was some little time before the Professor was sufficiently awake to understand what was required of him. "Ah yes," he said with a childlike smile of apology, "I had forgotten. There are yet a few small details which must attended to be. It is very strange. For a long time I have fretted because there was not more that I could do, but now everything seems all right, and I have no desire except to sleep. It has not been such a terrible drag, this quiet life of mine. It has been quite pleasant as I look back at it. Now, then, what is it I am to do?"

At Beppo's suggestion he directed them in which bag to find the drafts, and he signed them over to Beppo without reading the amounts upon their face. Clarice had used good judgment, and the drafts were not of a large amount. When he came to the last one he turned to the girl and said: "Now, my child, I want you to go to Paris and there to wait for Nachette—no, you had better go to Pisa and find out the boy Pietro—he has a good ear, it must not be lost to the world. Stay there until she sends for you. Clarice may not wish further care just now. She is a good woman, but one has to have tact of an exceeding high order to get along well with her. Always we were fond of each other, yet we kept it well in check. I shall sign this draft over to you so that you may buy some new clothes. Burn what you have and get everything new. It will help you the old life to forget. Do not become discouraged, this is a gentle world, after all."

He closed his eyes and was silent for a long time. When next he opened them he said: "Now, little one, you must go home. I do not wish you longer to stay; good-night, a pleasant sleep, and—auf viedersehen."

The girl made protests, but the old man was firm, and she finally left after quickly lifting his hand and kissing it. At the doorway she paused and gave Beppo and Luigi a keen, searching look. As she closed the door Luigi remarked: "I would wager thee a fair amount that that young person remembers our faces longer than any prayers of mine would force her to. And yet, withal, she is a pretty maid. There are not many women who make an impression upon my heart—in sooth, I am somewhat of a woman-hater—but this one is begin-

ning to arouse my slumbering interest. There is a mysterious charm about her——"

"The right amount of limbs and two good eyes are all the mysterious charm that any female needs to make a fool of you," interrupted Beppo testily. "You a woman-hater! I can see why a woman should hate you, for when you are near they find but little chance to speak, and the speaking of words is as dear to them as to you."

"You have no idea how lonely I have become since you have lost the power of speech. Sometimes I fear I shall have to learn your trick of turning things over in my mind, if only for amusement. I know not whether my uncle be still in prison or whether he has won his way into purgatory, but wherever he is, it would gladden his heart to know that my education is still progressing. From you I have learned many things; some day I may even learn to think."

"Then were my life well spent, for if you learned to think, it would not be long before I could teach you the value of holding your tongue."

The two friends continued to show their mutual appreciation of each other by vigorously waging their perpetual quarrel, until the Professor again opened his eyes and looked at them a long time without appearing to recognize them. He was very pale, and his eyes alone seemed to be alive. They moved from the face of Luigi to that of Beppo. Finally he said in a whimsical voice, as though thinking aloud: "Is it not all very strange? I have through the great cities and the courts of the earthly kings on my journey traveled, and yet here at the end I start out from a small, dingy room, and the only ones to wish me 'bon voyage' are two

strange faces but newly come into my life. They knew me not, yet they risked their lives to save mine. Oh, there is a vast amount of kindness in the world, after all!"

"Would you like a doctor?" asked Luigi impulsively.

"Nay, I am not sick. Would one wish a doctor to keep one awake when one is very weary?"

"Nevertheless I am going to get a doctor," persisted Luigi.

"Certainly—go at once," said Beppo. "I had forgotten to attend to this. This man leaves friends, we must be regular."

"Never again let me know that you have forgotten aught—the shock has well-nigh slain me," said Luigi, reveling in his own sarcasm.

The doctor came, examined the old Professor, shook his head, left some restoratives, and hastened away. Under the influence of the stimulants the little man seemed to regain his strength. He asked to be propped higher up on the pillows, and lay there smiling with perfect confidence into the faces of his companions. "Has either of you the good ear for music?"

"I play no instrument to win great praise, but I have always been counted a fair singer," said Luigi modestly.

"Silence, braggart! Would you lie to the Signor Professor?" said Beppo.

"Nay, it would give me pleasure to have him sing. I have noticed in your conversation that each humility in the heart of the other seeks to foster. This is a true sign of friendship, yet it must not cross the verge of justice. Sing to me—music ever its own charm has."

Luigi took a few deep breaths, threw back his head, and started to render a dainty love-ballad in the voice of an angry bull. Whenever he approached a note high or low enough to fill him with apprehension, he added strength and volume to an abnormally powerful voice, as though he would annihilate the note which had threatened to daunt him. After a few moments, during which Beppo was biting his lip and pacing up and down the narrow room, a pained but sympathetic look came into the face of the Professor, and he raised his hand for Luigi to stop.

"Your friends have deceived you," he said in a gentle, apologetic tone. "It is not so much the fault of your voice, which with much patient training might a very useful part in a large chorus take, but your ear has not the subtle discrimination. There is music in everything—to the good ear. It is like kindness to the good heart. I have heard Nachette play the noises of a busy street—not as a mere imitation, to show surface cleverness, but taking each sound and arranging them in the form of a melody. I am curious to learn whether or not the soul has need of the ear, or whether music is altogether of a spiritualness. I shall soon know."

"I told you not to worry him," said Beppo.

"Worry him? Did he not see at once that my voice had that rare quality which would stand out even in a great chorus?" exclaimed Luigi indignantly.

"Or in a menagerie," rejoined Beppo laconically.

"I never was in reality a man," said the Professor with a quaint, confiding smile. "When I was but young I did the most beautiful girl in all the world love; but she could never anything but

friendship and pity for me feel—just friendship and pity. I was a little man with a big head—like a comic doll, she said; so she married a great man who also a soldier was. I feared he was great in body only, and that he would not appreciate the rich beauty of her soul. Every year I have seen her, and every year she has worn a brave, smiling face, but alas! I could see the strength it took to hold the smile in its place; and yet even to the end I was always an object to cause only a gentle smile and the feelings of friendship and of pity. It has hurt me to know that never in all my life has a woman loved me to the point of forgetting all things else. It must be wonderful to know that one is thus loved. But I have not been bitter; always I have at the love-music thrilled the same as when a boy first feels the impulses of manhood. When I was young, like a father I was; and when I started to age, like a little child I became. My hair turned from flaxen to white, and no man saw; but always they treated me like a thoughtless child, unless they were in trouble, or needed something in the way of music."

Beppo and Luigi were seated close together, watching his face by the flickering light of a single candle. "Do you think it will be long?" asked Luigi in a whisper.

"We shall give him the night. I have some plans which must start to-morrow," replied Beppo.

"We shall give him all the time he wants. He has a look in his eyes like a dog I used to own. It was a good dog—he saved my life once; but a man put an end to him. Things were not well with the man after that. He shall have all the time he wants." Luigi arose and held a glass to the lips of

the old man, and he sipped and looked up gratefully. The tears came into the dark eyes of the younger man as the little Professor patted his rough hand and said softly: "You have the kind heart, even if not the good ear, and the kind heart is best."

"Do not worry," said Luigi in an unsteady voice, "you shall have all the time you wish."

"Yes, yes, I have had all the time that was necessary. I do not know whether I have made good use of my time, but at least I have done but little harm. Many a good ear have I found and put into the right track, and I have never placed a stumbling-block in the path of another. I have a sharp temper, and at times no doubt it was unpleasant for those about me, but they soon learned that there was but little lightning with my thunder. Oh, yes, time sufficient have I had. I have seen Nachette again, and now you will find her."

From that on he began to fail rapidly. He did not appear to feel pain, but each breath seemed a little shorter, and the beautiful fingers began to pick nervously at the rough quilt. "I cannot hear it plainly," he said at last in a slightly resentful voice. "I wish they would play louder or else that I might come closer." He lapsed into silence and seemed to be intently listening.

"What does he mean?" asked Luigi. "I can hear nothing."

"You are more lucky than I, for I can still hear the sound of your voice."

"Oh, oh!" said the little Professor in a tone of ecstasy. "Now I can hear, now I can hear! Yes, in my dreams I thought it would be like this. This is where the discords never come. I am like a lit-

tle child again, not knowing the whys or the wherefores, or all the man-made rules; but just opening my heart to a great wideness and drinking in the mystical music of sea, and breeze, and the rain upon the roof. Ah, Nachette, Nachette, you have caught something of the spirit, but you have not yet the touch. It is so beautiful that it gives me pain. It seems to tear me apart. I cannot breathe with the beauty of it; and yet I would not have it stop. Ah—ah! It—is so beautiful!"

Luigi had taken his hand and was stroking it lightly. Their glances met for a moment; they smiled—the little Professor freely and sweetly, the big rough man through tears which seemed to blind him; and then it was over.

Beppo had risen and was gazing out of the window as Luigi smoothed the pillows, arranged the silver locks, and crossed the slender hands upon the breast.

"It is daylight," said Beppo.

"I care not a damn if it be high noon," answered Luigi. "He had all the time he wished."

CHAPTER XXIII

BEPPO went forth from the quiet room, leaving Luigi sitting beside the bed upon which the still form of Professor Brahmfelder was sleeping peacefully, and sent his own telegram to Clarice. Then he called upon the doctor who had been in attendance. This doctor was a man of a practical rather than a Utopian nature, and his professional conduct was apt to be warped by sordid motives. For a substantial fee, which was all the more alluring because it was in a measure unexpected, he made over the death certificate without paying another visit, and also cashed the drafts which Beppo had. After this he sent another wire to Clarice telling of the Professor's death.

When he returned Luigi was still beside the bed, chin in hand and eyes fixed upon the quiet face before him. "It must be odd to be dead," he said as Beppo entered. "Here was a man who came into the world as a pebble is thrown into the sea by a child. He had no choice in the matter, he has had little about what has happened to him since; and now comes another jerk, and flip! he is thrown into another sea, leaving behind him a body which was more or less of a bother all his life to himself, and now must be a bother to others. Always he was asking himself why; and now he is beginning to ask it again when he finds himself forced to take up a new existence. He did not go to hell, this

man with the eyes of a good dog; I doubt even if he went to purgatory. When a chorus of angels is sent out to meet a man, I would be willing to lay a small wager that it is to escort him to heaven direct. And yet here he was never loved by a woman. Well, heaven will be a new thing to *him*, never having had even a taste of it here; but, on the other hand, women are apt to give you a taste of the infernal regions also. Now——"

"If you are to be the one to deliver his funeral oration, I should think it would be a good thing to write it," said Beppo, going to the open window and gazing out.

"When it comes your time to have a funeral oration, the officers of the poor—for you will leave no friends—will get a carrion-crow to deliver it. What are we to do now?"

"We are merely to await an answer from this person in Paris to whom I have sent the telegram. In the meantime I shall——"

"Turn a few small matters over in my mind," interrupted Luigi, imitating Beppo's voice. "There is always the clink of blood-money whenever that wonderful mind of yours has aught to turn over. A carrion-crow will deliver a fine oration for you. He will understand you so well."

"Look now to this. I have had my fill of your impertinence. You have a heart of mush. One would think that you had done naught all your life but teach a class of young girls in a Sunday-school. You are not apt to die of this change of heart. Just bide in peace a day or two, and you will be glad enough to dance to the clink of blood-money. If not, I shall get a bully more to my liking, and you can become a missionary and go to Africa."

"I should rather teach the class of girls."

They continued to whet their tongues until a wire arrived from Clarice, telling them to have the body prepared and to bring it at once to Paris with as much secrecy as possible. It also said that Bertrand would leave for Venice immediately, and concluded by the forwarding of an amount sufficient to defray expenses. "This searching for lost violin-players is a noble calling," said Luigi, "and I shall devote the balance of my days to it. One has only to shake the tree and down falls a harvest of gold."

There was no display when the body of the Professor with its two peculiar attendants reached Paris. Clarice met it and accompanied it to a vault, where, after taking one long look at the quiet, peaceful face, she had it laid away to await the return of Nachette. She cautioned Beppo and Luigi to silence, but as they had plenty of money and a new plan all worked out, they adjourned to a wine-shop in the evening and there discussed their prospects.

"What did I tell you?" asked Luigi in a triumphant voice. "This young girl that attracted my notice in Rome is all that I judged her to be. Did you notice her queenly air? Even with my new clothes she still refuses to notice me. I have half a mind to marry her."

"Half a mind! If you had the tenth part of a mind you would see that she would not have you for a door-mat. What of that girl in Venice who also aroused that dull interest of yours?"

"I can scarce choose between them. Mayhap I had better wait until I see them together. But if we continue to hunt with the same diligence, we

shall have this household so full of girls that by the time we discover the real one they will have no room for her."

"Then can you have her. Now, listen: Bertrand has gone to Venice, and another by the name of Jack; but we shall go where Nachette herself is and get the reward by ourselves; and then will our name resound throughout Europe, and we shall ride in our carriage and be great men all our lives."

"A great man should have a wife, if only to teach him manners. I shall certainly marry. When shall we start to find her?"

Beppo leaned forward and said in a whisper: "Say nothing more; I have seen eyes upon us."

"You must get used to that against the day that we become great. Where were the eyes?"

"Hold your gaze upon mine, fool! Are you losing what little sense was yours to begin with? Yon sleepy dolt beside you is not so dull as he would have others believe. His table is close, and I know not what he has heard. Come, let us go, and as we twist about we shall try to see what is in the wind."

They left the place with a careless air, but the man did not seem to heed them. Instead, another man arose, and though he had sat at some distance and had not caught the eye of Beppo, that worthy soon discovered that he was following them. Beppo turned abruptly and gave Luigi an imperceptible signal. Luigi caught the man's wrist with a twisting motion which made his head fly back and his eyes bulge out. Luigi did not look at him, but fastened a gaze of inquiry upon the face of Beppo.

"Whither are you going, friend?" asked Beppo

in a gentle voice. "Tell the truth, for we have a strange abhorrence to falsehood."

Luigi gave a sudden small twist for emphasis, and the man's face writhed in silent agony. He looked into the face of Beppo, and it was very composed, but for all that, exceedingly sinister. "I am but a poor man. I know not why, but I was told by one who sat in the wine-shop to follow you and learn where you dwell. That is all I know."

Beppo made no reply but kept steadily examining the face of the man before him, and Luigi could not allow this beautiful, golden silence to fade, missing its inlay of silver. "Tell him we be great men and bide with the President; and if it be not altogether true as a matter of history, it is a bit of prophecy upon which one might risk a pretty wager."

A man drew near, and Luigi promptly turned his man with his back to the wall, so that they seemed to be three friends in conversation. As the man stopped, Beppo saw that it was the one who had sat at the small table beside him, but he gave no sign. The man asked a few plausible questions, which a gentle pressure from Luigi caused his prisoner to answer. Suddenly Beppo gave a slight cry and dodged. Involuntarily the newcomer also dodged, and at that instant Luigi seized his wrist in the same manner as he was holding that of his first captive. The man had drawn a knife, but Beppo seized the wrist of the hand which held it and quietly removed it. "What is your business with us?"

"Do you want to make some easy money?" asked the man after a rapid scrutiny.

Luigi was standing between his two victims, one

arm of each twisted across the back. He smiled good-humoredly and said: "Your sight must be very poor, else would it save your voice the labor of such a question. We have a tree which bears golden apples, yet they are not always ripe, and if the bother were small, we might step aside for a space to shake another tree. Open your heart, friend, as though you were in your own confessional."

"I may not tell you aught to-night. When do you leave town?"

"We are the ones who do the asking of questions," interposed Beppo. There was an inflection in his voice, delicate and imperceptible to a stranger, but which was a signal to Luigi, who immediately gave a twist to the wrist of the man who seemed to be leader. "This man had told us somewhat before you came; we knew somewhat before we entered the wine-shop. Now, then, tell us your tale, and if the balance does not suit us—well, we dare not leave behind that which may give us bother."

Luigi all this time was continuing his slow, crushing twist, until the man had all he could do to refrain from screaming. "Peace," he said at last, "I shall tell all. I am no dog to be twisted apart for the whim of another. Have you ever heard of the Prince Alexander of Russia?"

Beppo nodded his head, and Luigi gave a conceited grin. "There be mighty few names among the great which would have a new ring to our ears. What of the Prince now?"

"He has need of a word with her you are seeking. I overheard enough of your talk this evening to know that you have located her. He would be

willing to give a goodly sum for the first speech with her."

"What would he call a goodly sum for such a favor?" asked Luigi.

The man hesitated. "I cannot answer such a question—a thousand francs—ten thousand francs —I cannot tell. Will you not go to see the Prince?"

"Surely we——"

Luigi felt a sharp pain in his thigh, and rightly ascribing it to the stiletto of his friend, he stopped abruptly.

"Where is he?" asked Beppo.

"He is even now in Paris, but as he is incognito I am not at liberty to tell his whereabouts."

"You are not at liberty at all, remember that," said Beppo sternly. "Listen: we leave by the ten o'clock train for Rome to-morrow. Let the Prince meet us with no attendant but yourself at the depot. He may hide where he will, and you can bring us to him. We play fair, see that he also plays fair. Now go you in yonder direction and turn not back. If the Prince desires to transact business with us to-morrow, he must bring some advance with him."

After the men had vanished in the distance, Beppo and his satellite hastened up a side street, called a cab, and were soon at their own lodgings. "I would I had the time to order me a new outfit of clothes. Those I bought in Venice have not the set of some I have seen here. If a man is to associate with Princes, he has need of a fitting presence," said Luigi.

"Listen, friend: if you are not careful there will be never a hat made which will go about your head. You did not do much damage with your constant

cackle to-night, yet was the risk great, and I knew not when I should have to sheathe my stiletto in your heart."

Luigi looked at him with slow anger gathering in his face. "And so the day has come when I look like the sheath of your stiletto? Then here is a small word of advice to you: be sure that its point reach the heart of the sheath, else will the sheath tear you apart and trample upon you. What am I—naught but a machine to twist wrists while you stand at ease and speak like a lady? I suppose that when I have made you great by the strength of my hands and the shrewdness of my head, you will dress me in purple and gold and have me for a servant. I am not part of your body, I also am a man, and when I have aught to say, I shall say it; and if you ever stick me with a knife again—and I remember it afterward—I shall surely visit punishment upon you."

"Do I not listen to your counsel when we are alone?" asked Beppo in a soothing voice. "Do I not divide with you penny by penny? Do I not know that you are a man of worth aud reliability above that of any other man I have ever met? A man cannot go about chucking you under the chin as though you were a young maid, yet you know how well I esteem you."

"I wonder if this real Nachette will be as pretty a maid as that other whom we first sent," said Luigi, perfectly mollified.

The next morning they called early at the home of Clarice, and she gave them full directions for writing to her, handed them money for their expenses, and finally she bestowed upon them her solemn blessing. She wanted them to wire her each

day; but Beppo told her that he did not wish their movements to be so well known, and promised to send her word as soon as he had any which was important. She had given him Bertrand's address in Venice, but Beppo would not tell even where he intended to go first.

On their way to the station Luigi insisted upon stopping the cab and having all the clerks at a fashionable haberdashery bring out shirts, collars, and scarfs for his inspection. Beppo sat wedged into a corner muttering imprecations under his breath, but Luigi was so filled with joy that he knew not the wrath of his fellow and continued to finger and question until Beppo was on the verge of madness. Finally Luigi concluded his purchases, and it was all that Beppo could do to prevent him from changing at once the gaudy shirt he was wearing for one of even greater splendor.

"If would seem to me," he said in answer to Beppo's protest, "that when a gentleman hires a cab, it becomes for a time his residence; and if he wishes to change his garments, it is a private matter and none other has a voice in it; but if it is as late as you say, I shall refrain. Anyway, this shirt which I am wearing is fit for any Prince."

As they entered the depot they saw the man of the wine-shop, and he told them that the Prince awaited them in a carriage a few blocks from the station. Not a shade of suspicion crossed the face of Beppo, and Luigi had none to disclose, so they hastened to the meeting-place. It was in a busy street, and they attracted no attention. The Prince invited them to enter, and they stepped in, Beppo grim and silent, Luigi smiling and affable.

There was no time lost in subterfuge. The Prince

was a judge of men and instantly placed the two before him at their proper value. After some little fencing between himself and Beppo, he agreed to give twenty thousand francs for Nachette, and paid them a thousand in advance. Luigi wished to prolong his ride as far as possible, but Beppo refused, and after the Prince had given them an address in Rome and had promised them lifelong service if successful, they parted. Just as he was closing the door of the carriage, Beppo leaned in, looked the Prince in the eye, and said: "We shall resent being shadowed. If His Highness values the comfort of his men, he will remember this."

The journey to Genoa was one of much pleasure to Luigi, who scattered tips and smiles at a great rate, but Beppo sat for the most part lost in a deep study. Just before they reached Genoa, Luigi lapsed into silence for a few moments, and then asked: "And to which shall we return this Nachette when we have found her?"

"I have not yet determined. There are many points to each argument."

"Then let me decide. I have just been thinking it over."

"And what conclusion have you arrived at?"

"Let us put her up at auction and have them bid for her. We know not who has the best right. Let each decide by his bid."

"That would be idiotic. We must be careful or we shall lose all."

"And then, too, she may have some voice in the matter. We had better wait until after we have her and then decide," answered Luigi sagely.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was late in the afternoon when Nachette and her companion reached Genoa, and the first thing they did was to select a cheap but clean lodging-house. Toney did not have much money but he had boundless hope, and a faith in Nachette's playing which knew no bounds. His nineteen years, spent entirely in Venice, had given him but a small stock of experience with which to face the outer world. His was an odd view of life: one played one's instrument, and if the saints were good one received a few coins; if not, one hoped for better things next time. He was as free from logic as a child, and as eager for novelty. This trip which they were taking was to him pleasant and amusing, and he had never asked himself what the ultimate outcome would be. Nachette had told him that Paris meant freedom from care, and he had never doubted it any more than he had stopped to wonder why Paris more than another city would work this miracle.

In the evening they started forth to find a place to play. They tried various corners without much success, and finally as the crowd was leaving the Garibaldi Theater they started to play in the square before it. They had arrived before the end of the opera, which Nachette had recognized, and she had taken up selections from it, which she

rendered in her own fascinating way. At first a few paused, then more, and finally the entrance of the theater was blocked by the listening throngs. Carriages were waiting, and those behind were impatient, while those in front cheered each selection to the echo, and coins began to shower into the hat which Toney passed.

In the midst of this two gendarmes elbowed their way through the crowd, arrested the musicians, and bore them off to jail, followed by the hisses of the crowd. Nachette felt that she had done no wrong, and yet the humiliation of being arrested almost stifled her. But to Toney it was only a usual incident, and as he walked along he talked cheerily to the gendarme who was holding his arm. He told him that they had arrived in Genoa only that afternoon, and had no idea that it was unlawful to play in the square. Receiving neither encouragement nor admonition, he continued to tell his story: that he and his sister wished to go to Paris and had saved enough money in Venice to make the trip, but that it had been stolen.

At last, when they reached a quiet street, Nachette could stand it no longer. In deep, pleading tones she begged the officers to take what money she had and let her go. Toney gave her the money they had collected that evening, and the two gendarmes looked at it with smiling eyes of approval; but the sum was not great enough to warrant the risk, and after a look of inquiry had passed between them they shook their heads and started on; but Nachette drew a small watch from her bosom and also offered that. It had been given to her by Jack, and even Clarice did not know she had it. "Listen," she said; "if you will take this and keep

it, I shall some time redeem it for a thousand francs."

"It was a small offense," said the first gendarme.

"And they are strangers to our city," said the other.

"If we were but sure that they would be discreet!"

"If they would promise to leave at once!"

"Now, friends," said the first, "if we should let you go, we should be taking a grave risk; but if we take you before the magistrate, he will put you in jail for six months—you have committed a most serious offense—and we cannot help but pity you. At Monte Carlo, now, you could play in peace, and there is always much money to be had at Monte Carlo."

Nachette eagerly agreed to leave at the following dawn, and in the end the gendarmes took the watch and the money, except the small amount Toney had hidden in the lining of his jacket, and bade them farewell with all friendliness. Next morning they left for Monte Carlo upon the first train, and found lodgings with the wife of one of the watchmen at the main gate of the Casino. He was an old man who had long been in his present position, and through his intervention they were allowed to play while the games were progressing. Nachette realized the danger she ran of being discovered, but relied upon her peasant dress, her heavy veil, and the careful suppression of all improvisation, to maintain her disguise.

Night after night they played, and slowly their savings were growing to the amount which they deemed necessary. There was one man who played

constantly and with luck which varied to the extreme limits. One night he was losing roll after roll, but his fat, cheerful face never lost its smile, although he made continual comment upon his wretched luck. "Hang the confounded thing!" he exclaimed at last. "I am going to beat it or break myself. Here, son, bring your girl over behind my chair and play me a good-luck tune."

Nachette and Toney took their places behind his chair and played a weird little selection. It was a catchy, tuneful bit, full of surprising twists, and it marked the turn of the stranger's luck. Steadily he began to win, and one gold piece went to Toney after each whirl of the wheel. He would neither let them stop nor change their tune, until at last he had broken the bank for that evening. He was as pleased as a child, and most of those about him entered into his joy. He received congratulations and promised dinners, and all in all was as happy as a boy who had saved the game of ball after it had seemed lost. He gave Toney a hundred-franc note, and after turning his gains over to two silent men who had been close to him all the evening, he left the room in company with Nachette and Toney. As soon as they reached the entrance he stopped and said: "How forgetful I am! I have left my handkerchief upon my chair. My ankle is weak—would you mind getting it?"

As soon as Toney had left, he turned to Nachette and said: "Come, let us stroll over here; I want to see your face."

Nachette tried to put him off, but he only laughed and treated her with more and more familiarity. He had been drinking, and his success had completely turned his head. "Nonsense!" he said in

miserable French. "Little girls who play in public for money must not be so touchy. Come, I shall give you a golden louis for a sight of your face."

He caught hold of her and was becoming so distasteful that finally Nachette said in crisp English: "Stop! If you have no shame of your own, remember that you are an American."

His mouth stood open in surprise, while the dull red rolled up over his face to show that he confessed to having been slapped. For a full minute he stood speechless, and then he said in a hesitating, embarrassed voice: "There isn't a thing I can say in excuse. I'm so doggone sorry that I'd be willing to pay a man top wages to kick me all the way across the ocean; but I'm pretty well lit up, you see, and then you know how it is when a fellow cuts loose and—oh, I can't straighten it out! But if there is anything in God's world that I can do to square myself, just let me know and I'm signed for the season. I—I know I lack culture, but, hang it! I can be trusted when I know what the game is."

He was so sincerely sorry that Nachette, whose ideal of the average man had been so roughly dethroned, promptly forgave him, but said that she could not confide her peculiar position to him.

"Now, look here, little girl, I've been amongst them quite a bit lately, and I know you to be a real lady. You are either doing this for a stunt or you need money. If you need money, I have a ton of it, and all you have to do is to speak the amount and I'll pay it off my roll. Now just play that I'm your big brother and scold me if it will help any, but don't hesitate about putting in your requisition."

She looked at him a moment in wavering indeci-

sion, and then said: "I am truly thankful to you, and I did need money, but I have enough now. All I ask you to do is to forget that I am an American, and to treat me in the future as though all this had never happened—I mean, not to recognize me in any way at all."

He started to speak, but at that moment Toney returned with the word that some one else must have picked up the handkerchief, as he could not find it anywhere. "Will you promise to be here to-morrow night?" the American asked with a wistful trace of contrition in his voice. "I want to make another play—will you come?"

Toney promised at once, and after a moment's thought Nachette said that if nothing intervened she also would come. They then said good-night and parted. As Toney walked along he talked constantly about their wonderful luck, and made plans for the future in which Paris had no part. There was also a marked difference in his attitude toward Nachette. Formerly he had always seemed like a pleasant young boy; but there was an assurance about him now which attracted the attention of Nachette and filled her with an intangible apprehension. Just before they entered their lodging-house they passed two men. One was short and stout with bright, small eyes; the other was tall and broad but ungainly, although he walked with an affected strut. This oddly mated pair paused and turned as the two entered the house.

As soon as Nachette reached her room, which was at the front of the house, she raised the window and sat looking up at the stars and thinking of all that had happened that evening. As she sat by the window she saw the two men come to the door

and knock. When the woman reached it they told her that they were strangers but newly arrived at Monte Carlo and desired lodging. As the woman began to ask questions, the taller interrupted her and said: "Now you must learn at once that it is we who do the asking of questions. We are men of wealth and station who are traveling incognito and do not wish to attract attention. For this reason we choose this humble house in preference to a hotel, but if you can make us comfortable you shall have ample reward."

This appeal had the desired effect, and Nachette saw the men enter the house, little dreaming of the part which they had already taken in her own affairs. She had much to think about that evening; the surge of luck which had brought in the money that made the trip to Paris a surety had also brought its disquieting complication. The action of the American did not worry her, but the change in Toney did. She felt that she could rely upon the American in the future, but she was certain that she now had a new and different Toney with whom to deal. When she had said that they must leave at once for Paris, he had looked resentful and had answered that it would be an insult to the saints to show so poor an appreciation of the good luck which they had sent.

The next evening Nachette showed a marked hesitancy in going to the Casino, and Toney laughingly told her that she was one of those who could not stand prosperity, but that for himself he always stood ready to follow when the goddess of good fortune deigned to smile upon him. She finally consented, and they found the American pacing impatiently back and forth in the large room. His face lighted when he saw them, but he played his

part well and used the tone of an unquestioned superior when he good-naturedly ordered them to play him good luck once more. They played, and fortune was with him again, although not in quite so overwhelming a volume. After he had made a considerable winning he turned to Nachette and said in his own individual French: "Come, girl, give me your age, and I shall play a louis upon it for each year. If there is anything which would make a woman ambitious in the matter of years, this is the wrinkle. Go as far as you like."

After a moment's hesitation Nachette said that her age was twenty, and he shook his head sadly and said: "Not even for gold will a girl act grown up. Well, we'll see what we get anyway. Now start up your luck-tune and we're off."

The wheel whirled, the little ball danced merrily around, and finally stopped in the twenty. "Seventeen thousand francs! Nice work, nice work! Now here are your winnings; but I am going to keep the original five hundred for luck. No, you have to take it; remember that I do not lose one penny—nobody does, because this table can't lose in the end, and your win will be a big advertising card. Here, boy, you look after it."

Toney had no ethics which would be violated by prompt acceptance, and he immediately took the bills and thrust them into his bosom, while his eyes gleamed feverishly.

"Now, then, play something American for my sake," said their benefactor. "There are lots of us here; come on."

Nachette was on the point of refusing, but she thought that it would be unkind and might lead him to believe that she cherished resentment. She

put her bow to her violin, and after a short introduction started "My Old Kentucky Home." She had thought herself able to play it simply, but as she played she recalled the times she had played it for Jack, and as he came into her mind all caution left. She had missed the watch he had given her, and wondered if he would blame her for pledging it even to escape arrest. Memories and hopes chased each other through her mind, and gradually her eyes closed and the violin had its way. The wheels stood idle, while from every part of the large room throngs hurried to listen to the wonderful music. As she finished she opened her eyes and looked about her as one in a vision, and then her position came back to her and she longed to be away. The room was ringing with bravos and encores; but she heeded them not and started to leave. The American pleaded with her to remain and play some more, offering to put a hundred dollars on the wheel for every American tune she would play; but she told him that she had a severe headache and would have to go at once.

Followed by the pouting Toney, she walked rapidly out of the Casino and started for her lodgings. She had not reached the entrance, however, before the American was at her side. "Now, look here, I don't want to be a bore, but I do want to speak to you a moment. You amble on a step, son."

When Toney had left them he said in a deep, earnest tone: "Now, child, you know that I respect your reserve—I'm not trying to butt in, but at the same time there is something about you which I think could be straightened out. That dago is no brother of yours—I am not going to try to guess what his position is—but I want to say

right here that if you want to shake him and go back anywhere, why, I'm ready to put the job through and would feel flattered if you would allow me to. It won't give me any call on you, mind; just the minute you say, 'Stuff's off,' right there I'll stop."

She thanked him with open heartiness, but told him that he could do nothing and that everything was all right with her. Then they shook hands and Nachette rejoined Toney, and together they hastened to their lodgings. On the way she told him that they must prepare to leave on the morrow. He stopped and looked at her. "We shall not leave to-morrow," he said with decision. "We will be a fad here now; others will want us to play to give them luck, and when we do not bring them luck I shall say that their stars differ from ours, and others will try to see if their stars are in harmony. I have thought it all out; we shall become rich and famous. No, indeed, we shall not go. I am no child, and you will not be allowed to act so foolishly."

She argued with him, but he was firm, although he did not lose his good-nature. They climbed the stairs together, and at the top he said in a low tone: "Now try and have better thoughts. Together we can conquer the world. See, you were poor when I first befriended you, and I also was poor, though not so poor as you; now we are both rich. We must not separate, we must stay always together, and then nothing can prevail against us. I have more to say to you at some other time. Good-night."

He tried to take her hand, but without appearing to notice it she turned and entered her own room,

locked the door, and threw herself across the bed. Was there no escape for her? Must she always be taken up to the promised land only to be tortured by what she saw but could not reach? For a long time she lay upon the bed, but there were no tears to relieve her, only dry sobs as she murmured softly the name of Clarice and still more softly the name of Jack.

CHAPTER XXV

THE next morning the master of the house, or rather the husband of its mistress, permitted himself to be run down by an automobile and thus found an entrance to the hospital. After lunch the woman went to see him, and Beppo and Luigi sat in the small parlor downstairs and discussed each other's individual shortcomings and their combined effectiveness.

"Can you never cast eyes upon a girl without losing your heart to her?" asked Beppo.

"She smiled upon me first; and anyway, I have not yet lost my heart to her. We knew where Nachette was last night, and that we could do naught with her, so I thought it no harm to try to discover just what peculiar thing there was in this girl which attracted me. 'Tis seldom enough that I come across one who does, and I hate to miss the sensation. This girl is of an unusual depth of mind, and it delighted me to listen to her words of wisdom. Also she was as innocent as a babe, which in itself is a thing to draw one on. There is no knowing what might have happened if it had not been for my stroke of ill luck."

"When did you lose the money?"

"I know not. I am sure I had it when I started, and I seem to remember that I felt to see that it was safe as we strolled along the cliff; but when I

went to pay for our wine it was gone. It was a most singular occurrence."

"It was a miracle," said Beppo with gross sarcasm. "Never did I hear of so strange a thing. I wonder it did not take the life of that innocent babe who smiled upon you *first*. Of one thing I am as certain as I am of death: that peculiar girl with the great depth of mind had more about her to attract me when she left than when she met you."

"Do you think she stole it?"

"Oh, no, I should not call a deed like that by so dignified a term. She merely relieved you of the weight of it. It is a good thing I do not give you all your share at one time, else would I have to support you by mine own thrift."

"Oh, you are not always so thrifty. It is easy enough to criticize, but I did not lose so much last night as you did in learning to run that fool motor-car; but did I make the air hideous with my complainings?"

"That was in the way of business, as I explained to you."

"You not only explained it, but you made me pay my share whether I would or no; yet have I never seen the time when our business required such a knowledge. I shall keep a chauffeur when I become a man of substance."

"The time may come sooner than you think. But come or not, knowledge, no matter how expensive, has a value. Your idle deeds never have an excuse."

"Is that so? Remember the terrible fuss you made when I stole the watch from the gendarme in Genoa; but if it had not been for that clue, how would we have known whom to ask about her?"

"It turned out well enough, but it was a fool's risk, and I was filled with joy when we finally escaped from the city unnoticed."

"I had no fear. It is not in reason that he got the watch lawfully, and he was more worried at its loss than even its value gave him the right to be. If a man wish to keep his watch, be he a gendarme or an honest man, let him keep it in his pocket where it belongs, and not in his hand as a toy."

"I care not about your stealing the watch, but only that you took it from a gendarme. Who knows how soon we may be seeking favors from the police? A man must look to the future."

"As the undertaker said when he doffed his hat to the doctor. But what is going on above? It sounds as though there was a quarrel in the wind."

They listened intently, finally going to the foot of the stairs in order to get a better point of vantage. Toney and Nachette had become so engrossed in their discussion that they had forgotten that anyone else might be in the same house.

"Marry you?" said Nachette in a tone in which indignation and surprise struggled for the mastery. "You must have lost your reason! You are nothing but a servant in my eyes. I was willing to treat you as a friend, but you are not worthy of it, and now I expect to pay you as soon as we reach Paris and let that end it. I shall give you all that we have taken in together, making up to you what you have spent for our expenses. You now have in your possession over seventeen thousand francs. I have done more to earn them than you, yet I do not wish to share them. Take me to Paris and you may have them all."

The hand of Luigi closed upon the arm of his

fellow with such force that Beppo was forced to bite it in order to gain prompt relief.

"What of that?" answered Toney. "Once it would have seemed a vast sum; but is there not many times as much waiting our pleasure? Since you are to be so obstinate, I too will show my firmness. I have watched you closely. You are a great musician, but you have done some crime and fear to be discovered. Now I refuse to give you any of this money or to take you to Paris. You will have to play in order to live, and in a short time you will consent to marry me and then we shall be happy."

"Leave the room—leave this instant!"

"Will you play at the Casino to-night?"

"What I do in the future is no concern of yours. Leave the room."

There was a moment of silence, and then the watchers below heard the slamming of a door and the reluctant footsteps of Toney as he returned to his own room.

"Go you and see if we can rent an automobile," said Beppo.

"Is this a time to ride in an automobile? It seems to me that this is the time to strike."

"Dolt! Do you think it is for pleasure that I wish the automobile? This is that matter of business for which I was wise enough to prepare."

"The devil always seems to aid in your business; but what are we going to do?"

Beppo looked at him as though he would blast him with a glance, but finally said: "We are going to take her to Genoa, and then to Rome by boat. After that we shall get our reward from the Prince."

"And so we lose our reward from the woman called Clarice."

"No; from Genoa we telegraph Bertrand to meet us in Rome. As soon as we get our reward from the Prince, Bertrand takes her from him and we share in that other reward also."

"You are a great man! I know it is foolish to remind you of aught, but what about these seventeen thousand francs which this young lad above has? It might be well to drop him off a cliff."

"I hate the turn your mind has for violence. He will give them to us for the asking. Leave that to me."

"I might as well; there is nothing escapes you; but at the same time, I hardly take him to be so polite. Well, I shall see about the car. When do we want it?"

"To-night, at eight o'clock. See that you select a good one and get the lowest terms."

A woman, neighbor to their hostess, came in and prepared dinner. Nachette ate hers in her own room, and as soon as it was finished Toney went to her room and urged her to go to the Casino. She refused absolutely, and at last, when he began to grow violent, Beppo and Luigi crept up the stairs. At the top Beppo whispered: "Now, listen: do nothing except what I say; I have everything planned out; and above all, don't worry about the money. Do not take it without my permission."

Luigi whispered consent, and then they entered the room. Nachette was standing with head thrown back and defiant eyes fixed on the face of Toney, who was speaking in a low, firm voice. Both turned and faced the intruders. "What do you wish?" asked Toney.

"A few words in private with this lady. You

go with my friend, and when I wish you I shall let you know."

At first Toney was inclined to bluster, but looking at the loose but powerful frame of Luigi and his placid expression of confidence, he stamped his foot, and together they left the room.

"Have no fear, we are your friends. You are Nachette—is it not so?"

"I refuse to answer any questions until you first tell me who you are and what you wish with me."

"I cannot tell you unless I am sure that you are Nachette."

Beppo's voice was perfectly even, and Nachette could read in it neither threat nor promise. She waited a moment and then said: "I am Nachette. Now what do you wish?"

"We wish to take you back to your friends. They have confided in us and we have finally proved worthy of it."

"How can I know this?"

Beppo took a draft from his pocket and showed it to her. It was signed by Clarice. Then he took out her watch and gave it to her. "This we saw upon the person of a gendarme whom we had occasion to use in our search at Genoa. He could give no good explanation and so we kept it."

She took the watch with a little exclamation of delight and thrust it into her bosom. "And will you take me at once to Paris? Oh, I have had so many disappointments!" She paused, the expression upon her face changed, and then she continued sadly: "I cannot trust you. How do I know that you will take me to my friends?"

"Your friends have trusted us," said Beppo gently.

Nachette felt that she had been rebuked, but still she did not feel perfect confidence. "Where is the Prince Alexander of Russia?"

"I do not know," answered Beppo, and then added as an afterthought, "Do you wish to see *him?*"

"No, I do not, but I fear that he may find out where I am. Are none of my friends near?"

Then an idea occurred to Beppo. "Yes, a very fond friend is near, but he is sick in Genoa. We shall go to him by automobile."

"Who is it? Oh, tell me who it is!"

"It is Professor Brahmfelder. Shall we return and say that you would not come to his bedside?"

"No, I shall go. I shall be ready in a few moments."

Beppo left the room and went to that of Toney. Luigi was seated between his prisoner and the door. As Beppo entered Toney sprang to his feet and said in excited tones: "What is the meaning of this outrage? Every time I have made a move this ruffian has ordered me to be still, and when I attempted to leave the room he threatened to sit upon me if I was not less restless. I shall make a complaint of this."

"Your complaint has naught of interest for us. What we wish is a matter of seventeen thousand francs which you have in your possession but which belongs to the young lady in the front room. Will you give them willingly, or will you force us to call in the law?"

A baffled look came into Toney's eyes. "No more than half belongs to her," he said sullenly.

"Now we do not wish to bandy words with you. You have little idea who the lady is, or you would

plead for your life; but give us the money and your promise to forget all that has happened, and we shall let you go."

Toney looked at Beppo and saw a grim face which showed no sign of relenting; then he looked at Luigi, who was smiling in utter complacency. "She does not demand all, does she?" he said at last.

"You may have a little change with which to pay your reckoning, but I must take the balance in charge. Now stay in this room without any disturbance and all will be well with you; but do not arouse us, for you have tried to do a serious crime, and naught but our pity for your youth has let you off. I shall lock the door of the room and leave the key in the outside."

Toney gave Beppo the roll of money and then threw himself upon the bed in a flood of tears. It was more than he had ever hoped to possess, and he had been allowed to keep it such a short time. The two men left the room just as the horn of an automobile sounded at their door. Luigi had been unable to rent a car without also taking the chauffeur, but Beppo said that they could arrange that on the road, and Luigi had procured some cords which might later prove of service.

Nachette came down at once, walking with a firm step, but hiding a pale, troubled face behind her heavy veil. Beppo prepared to drive the machine, while Luigi rode behind with Nachette. They proceeded at a slow pace until Beppo had learned the mechanism, and then the car took on a hum of higher tempo and ate up the road like a hungry monster. There was nothing said, until finally the chauffeur asked where they were going. When

Beppo answered, "Genoa," he said that he would not be allowed to take them that far, as the car had only been ordered for a short drive that evening, and he would lose his place if he disobeyed orders. Beppo made no answer, but continued to run the car with skilful care. Finally the chauffeur reached over and shut off the power.

"Listen," said Beppo quietly. "It is necessary for us to go to Genoa. If you do not wish to go, all right, get out and telegraph ahead to watch for us; but we must go, and there is nothing further to be said on the subject."

His voice was low and calm, but Luigi had caught his signal and the ropes lay close to his hand.

"This car turns about right now," said the chauffeur with emphasis.

"I am sorry, but you have made a mistake," said Beppo.

The next moment the chauffeur felt himself seized by a grip of steel, and before he fully understood the situation he was bound and gagged and lying beside the road.

"We wish you no harm," said Beppo, "and when we get to Genoa we shall send the car back at once with instructions to look for you. You have become entangled in an affair of state, and it will be well to keep this experience as close as possible. Farewell."

"Why did you do that?" asked Nachette.

"He had a suspicious way. I do not like to resort to violence, but the Prince Alexander has many emissaries and it is not wise to take a chance. When we arrive in Genoa we shall send the car back and he will be found, if not earlier."

Again the car settled into its steady pace, and

they sped on through the darkness, the lights ahead causing weird shadows which seemed to threaten them, but there was no variation in the smoothness of the machinery until the car suddenly gave a violent lurch. It zigzagged across the road before Beppo brought it to a stop.

"What is the matter now?" asked Nachette in an anxious voice.

"The steering gear is out of order," answered Beppo shortly.

He soon fixed it, and they took up their journey once more. The darkness, the monotonous hum of the machinery, and the lack of anything needing his attention soon lulled Luigi to drowsiness. He was at peace with himself and with the world, and soon his head fell over against the high back of the seat, and he slept soundly as the car sped on.

In her corner Nachette clasped her violin tight to her breast, while her hand closed over the tiny watch which nestled there and seemed to be the hand of him who had given it. She was going to meet her heart's desire after what seemed to be years of absence. Would he love her as much as when she had last seen him? Would he see any change in her? Would there be any strangeness between them? These and many other questions bearing the bitter-sweet of love's restless doubt flashed into her mind as she sat erect in her corner and watched the slender augers of light boring into the darkness ahead.

CHAPTER XXVI

JACK had met with but little success in Venice. He had found Bertrand in a wine-shop studying a book in which were many queer signs, and had offered to combine forces and to work together; but Bertrand had answered with reserve and dignity: "It would be impossible for us to work together. My methods are my own and you would be unable to understand them. Neither would the men you have under you. I have developed my own system, and I train my own men. If I reach a place where you can be of assistance I shall let you know; but now I consider it best to work independently."

"Two heads are better than one," said Jack good-naturedly. "We are both anxious to achieve the same results—surely we can do better by working in unison."

"Well, then," said Bertrand, "what have you discovered?" Jack was forced to confess that he had discovered nothing, and Bertrand shook his head like one who had been prepared for the worst, and said: "See—what good is such a report to me?"

"What have you discovered?" asked Jack.

Bertrand sat looking at his book in silence. Finally he said: "Well, I know that she has left the city, but more than that I do not wish to say."

As he had already told more than he himself knew, he was not so ungracious as Jack supposed,

when he arose and with a curt farewell bade him good-by. Jack had two men with him who were of high standing in their profession, but their theory was all at fault. It was to be supposed that an artist of Nachette's class would be found amidst luxurious surroundings; and they spent much time in thoroughly searching the hotels and even some of the private houses of Venice, but without meeting with the slightest success.

Jack was becoming very much discouraged. There was a fear in his breast that the Prince had finally won; that the very worst had happened and Nachette had remained with him, not through force but through desire. In striving to solve the problem of Professor Brahmfelder's death the horrid thought had crept in unbidden—the little Professor had seen Nachette and she had refused to recognize him. Jack knew all too well that this would have been enough to stop forever the faithful heart which had loved her so; and as he heard more and more of the life of Prince Alexander with its slimy trail of conquests—conquests made with dazzling rapidity by means of a peculiar fascination almost irresistible to the average woman—Jack despaired of ever again seeing the light-hearted, hopeful girl who had said farewell at the station in Rome so many, many dreary days ago.

And then the clouds broke and the sunshine came through.

One morning as Jack turned a corner in the Rue Napoli he came face to face with an exceedingly tall, clean-built individual in the raiment of one who chases Time by his latest and most deadly foe. Jack was too much preoccupied to pay more attention than was absolutely required in piloting his

course, but the motor-car man gave a glad whoop, put his arms on Jack's shoulders, and chanted: "Little Jackie Horner turned around a corner, having nothing else to do—ran into a man, the trouble then began—Gee whizz, but I'm glad to see you."

Flossie stopped his nonsense and gave his friend a long and critical survey. When he finished he shook his head sadly. "My poor dear boy, you are entirely off form. Why, hang it, Jackie, you are all to the bad! You're rocky, you're peaked, you've gone stale, you are getting the fried-egg eye, you—what the deuce is it, old chap?"

"Oh, I've been a bit worried lately. Where are you from, and where are you going?"

"Oh, I'm from here and there, and I'm either going back or somewhere else. You don't want to listen to the short and simple annals of the poor—tell me your own troubles. I generally cure if taken in time."

"By Jove, Flossie, you do lift the clouds! I suppose you have been having all kinds of picturesque adventures on your trip."

"Well, of course I am not the wild blade I was in my younger days—twenty-seven puts the pompous dignity on a man all right. Still they generally know that I have came, very shortly after I have arrove. Do you happen to know the lurking-place of an American bar?"

The two friends sauntered along until they came to the Continental. They entered, and taking a seat at a small table beamed across it at each other with the open candor of well-tried friendship. Flossie rattled on in his breezy way, while Jack tried to keep his own bitter thoughts from intruding, while he drank in the overflow of Flossie's high

spirits with far more satisfaction than his high-ball gave him.

"By the way," said Flossie finally in a tone of horror, "it is nearly two hours after lunch-time. Come."

Jack arose with less enthusiasm, and as they started to leave asked, "Where do you really expect to go next?"

"Do you know," said Flossie, "that I never have the final word on that? I go to work and make a lot of plans, but at the last moment some friend comes in, and before I know it I am taking him or some of his belongings in an entirely different direction. I did think that I'd like to float over into Servia for a while to see if it wasn't something like Zenda; but this very morning I got a wire from Smith wanting me to come to Monte Carlo. He's clear batty—but say, that reminds me: you haven't told me a word about that musical prodigy who was disturbing your slumbers when I left Paris. Smith also has found one. This one is disguised as the goddess of Fortune, and Smithy is acting mighty cruel to the banks down at Monte. What do you think of this for a wire?"

Without noticing the peculiar expression on Jack's face, Flossie handed him a telegram. Jack took it and read: "Load all your ready in the perfume buggy and tack for this port; mysterious veiled lady here who plays violin to charm a snake; she is giving me oceans of luck and I am winning tons of money; broke the bank once; make this a hurry-up call and we'll both break it."

Jack's face turned white as he read it, and as he thrust it into his pocket he said shortly, "Where is your car?"

"I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet," quoted Flossie, "but I'll bet my last drop of gasoline that my next trip is all planned out." Happening to note the expression on Jack's face, he changed his tone and continued briskly: "The cart is all to the good—had my boy put it in shape this very morning. Just as soon as we eat a bite of lunch I stand ready to sail under sealed orders."

"We haven't time for lunch—we can eat tomorrow."

"Why, so we can—how thoughtful you are! And we need not worry about sleep either, for next winter, when the nights will be longer, we shall have a much better opportunity. Come, I have no affairs of my own, and you cannot imagine how thrilling it is to be mixed up even in a humble capacity with one of these fly-for-your-life events."

"Wait a moment. I want to drop in here and see if Bertrand has had any news; he may want to go with us."

"That is so, too; but if he has had time to make up his mind already, he is of a great promptness. Who is he? But never mind, if he has decided to go I shall have a chance to get acquainted; if not, he don't owe me any money, anyway."

Bertrand had that very morning stumbled upon Toney's aunt and had learned that a girl who answered perfectly the description of Nachette had left over a week before for Genoa. He was in a perfect ferment. He had sent in a report instantly, and had just received the draft a requisition for which was part of his wire. His bag was packed and he was ready to leave on the next train, when Jack burst in and told him that he had a clue which

seemed to give every assurance that Nachette was in Monte Carlo.

"When did she leave Genoa?" asked Bertrand in a surprised tone.

"Have you known that she was in that neighborhood?"

"My boy," said Bertrand loftily, "I manage to keep in close touch with each movement, but have not yet succeeded in closing the net. I am about to go there and conduct the final movements in person."

"Then you can come with us in the touring-car."

Bertrand put on an expression of deep study, took out his mysterious book, and examined several pages with critical indecision. Finally he said: "Yes, I think that will probably be a wise move. I shall leave a few instructions and be ready in a moment."

Jack fidgeted in futile impatience while Bertrand made line after line of meaningless hieroglyphics upon a sheet of paper. When he finished Bertrand glanced carefully over the page, made two alterations, arose, and with ponderous preoccupation placed the paper behind a dingy and faded chromo which hung on the wall. Then he turned away and stood with chin in hand as though a thousand warring arguments were pleading with his will.

"Bertie has my tag," whispered Flossie to his friend. "Get him to pull a few rabbits out of my hat or do something really worth while."

"Come, I am ready," said Bertrand, picking up the dilapidated bag which had been resting in a corner.

"Bertie looks as though food were merely a youthful folly. I bet I have a joyous time on this

expedition," muttered Flossie in cheerful resignation.

During most of the trip Bertrand sat in his corner. Several times Jack had sought to draw him into conversation, but he had replied that he had many small items to fit into his plan according to the proven rules of his method. Flossie also had failed to find any kindred spirit in the car, as Jack's replies to him had been nearly as unsatisfactory as the ones Bertrand had given to Jack; so in desperation he had finally attempted to frame a befitting song. There was apparently no end to the verses, and as the tune was entirely free from motif the rhythm was a matter of small account. He stuck steadfastly to the chorus, however, until it became a part of the car's hum. "Oh, why do we wish to eat or sleep, or why do we long to drink? If we only cut out such frivolous things, we'll have more time to think. The poor old liver is overworked, the stomach in need of rest—let us hustle away both day and night, and stamp out the whims of our appetite. If we live long enough it will seem all right, and will probably be for the best; and will probably be for the best; and will——" this last was repeated until an idea for a new verse arrived. His voice made up in volume what it lacked in melody, and more than this could no man say.

As they entered Genoa Bertrand turned to Jack and said solemnly, "Have you any men searching this city?"

Jack replied that he had not, and Bertrand reflected a moment before saying, "Well, perhaps we had better go on to Monte Carlo."

They did not stop a moment in passing through the city, although Flossie waved his hand or threw

kisses to the restaurants as they flew past. Soon the lights faded behind them, and again they seemed to be a fragment hurled off by the centrifugal force of the whirling planet and sailing out into boundless space. There were few others on the road, and they flew along at a steady pace which soon left the miles behind them.

They had just turned a slight curve and far down the road saw coming toward them the lights of another car. No matter how much night-riding one does, there is always much the same sensation caused by the approach of another motor as is experienced in mid-ocean when the hull of another craft rises up out of the sea. Rapidly the two cars drew together, and even Bertrand permitted himself the luxury of turning his attention to an occurrence which was not material to his deep-laid plans.

Closer and closer they drew, and Flossie had already turned out to give a fair share of the road. The lights of the two cars glared into each other like the jealous eyes of wild beasts meeting by chance in the dim paths of the jungle. Suddenly the one approaching gave a wobble and turned to the left. Flossie instantly shut off the power, and that of the other car was also turned off. Both cars began to slacken, but not quickly enough. With the certainty of fate they rushed at each other; there was a crumbling crash, and the strange car, which had once more turned to the right, was struck midships and nearly overturned.

CHAPTER XXVII

AS the cars crashed together a woman's shriek was mingled with the cries of a startled man, and then for a moment all was silent. Flossie and his mechanic sprang to the ground and hurried ahead, quickly followed by Jack. Flossie turned the handflash which he carried upon a large man who sat by the roadside bemoaning his fate in stentorian tones.

"By all the saints, I shall never sleep in one of the devil traps again! From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am one mass of bruises, and I know not why or wherefore. I always said it was a waste of time and money to learn to run one, and it is true. Or at least it is true that it is a foul waste of good money to half learn to run one, for if you had not thought you could handle one, we should have found some other way; or if you really could have run one, we should not now be in such a plight. I care not——"

"Then cease your endless complaining," interrupted Beppo, who was standing beside the car, which still rested upon two wheels and the other auto.

In the meantime Flossie and his man had discovered the form of a woman in peasant dress lying unconscious at the roadside. They had carried her a little farther from the center of the road and the

man had gone for a flask of whisky, which was in the car. He gave it to Jack, who was anxious to do what he could to hasten their start. As Jack sought to revive the girl, whose quiet face was barely visible in the dim starlight, Flossie and his aide slowly backed their car away and the other settled back on the road.

They examined theirs and found it slightly marred but not much damaged. The other motor was in worse shape, and Beppo, who had attended them closely, explained that the steering-gear had gone wrong just as he had turned out to pass them. A careful examination proved that the car could be repaired sufficiently to resume the journey, and while the chauffeur and Beppo were at work upon it, Flossie strolled over to where Jack was just beginning to see signs of returning consciousness in the girl he was working over.

"We can start as soon as you are ready. How is she getting on?" he asked.

"She is coming around all right, I think. As far as I can tell, no bones are broken, but she has had a severe shock," answered Jack.

"I wonder why that big lump does not come and see how she is doing instead of sitting on that rock and muttering to himself."

Just then the girl gave a long sigh, and her hand was slowly raised and mechanically closed over the hand of Jack, which was bathing her temples. "Will it never, never end?" she asked in a weary voice.

As the voice fell upon Jack's ears he leaned forward, straining his eyes in the darkness, then he turned and said hoarsely, "Bring that light."

"We are nearly through; in another——"

"Bring the light now!" At the fierce ring in Jack's tone as he interrupted him, Beppo hurried over with the electric torch. Jack took it and turned it full in the face of the girl, and then a low cry burst from him: "Nachette—oh, Nachette, speak to me, tell me that you are not hurt! Oh, Nachette, Nachette!"

A pained expression came across the face of the girl as Jack turned the torch away. She put her hand over her eyes and said in a low voice, which sent a heartache to the man who bent above her: "Oh, it sounds like his voice—it *sounds* like his voice, but I have heard it so often before in my dreams, and then—then the cruel dawn would come and drive my dreams away."

Jack leaned still lower and put his lips to her ear. "It is my voice, dearest, my own true voice, and now all your dreams are ended and we shall go back together. Oh, dearest, tell me you are not hurt—try to move and see if you are all right."

"Oh, Jack, is it really and truly you? Oh, you can never know all that I have been through! Yes, I am sure that I am all right. See, I can move all of my limbs, and as soon as I rest a little I shall be ready to go. And now tell me all about Clarice—and yourself."

Jack sat on the ground and took her in his arms. She leaned back with a long, blissful sigh, and their lips met in the first kiss since that night in the park. He put his cheek against hers and whispered. When he finished she raised her lips to his ear and whispered her answer. All this time Flossie was standing with the torch pointing off into space and his eyes earnestly fixed on a distant star. "Er—I say, Jack, I don't see that you have any

further use for this light, so if you think you can get along without me for a few moments I'll see what I can do to put the drays in order."

Jack grunted a reply, and Flossie held the light while Beppo and the mechanic finished the repairs. All this time the imperturbable Bertrand had kept his seat without comment or question. He had made up his mind before starting upon the trip that he would make an impression upon Jack which would outweigh any failures which he might make in the line of results; but so composed had he held himself after the accident, that before he knew it he had fallen asleep, and was totally unaware of the fact that his two aides were the occupants of the car which had been run into.

Finally Flossie called out that the cars were ready to resume their journey. Jack assisted Nachette to her feet, took a few steps up and down the road to see that all was well, and as she appeared to be suffering nothing but the dull ache of a general shock, he suddenly remembered that she had been in the hands of her captors when the two cars had struck. He left her standing at the side of the road and hurried up to Flossie. "Are you armed?" he asked in an excited whisper.

"Of course," answered Flossie. "Why?"

"This is the girl I told you of. She was abducted several weeks ago, and I have been searching for her ever since. Now these men do not know that we are her friends, and——"

"Well, if your little demonstration is the way total strangers usually meet in this part of the world I am going to bring my tent and camp out awhile."

"Cut it out! This is serious. Now draw your gun and back me up."

Luigi had finally ceased his monotonous complaining and had sauntered over to where Beppo was standing at the side of the rented car. At Jack's stern command both men put up their hands and stood with their backs to the car with looks of astonishment on their faces. "Now then," said Jack, "what have you to say for yourselves?"

Both remained silent for a time, and then Luigi spoke. "If your honor please, this is a rented car. I have always maintained that simple men like us had no right to dabble in matters the like of which is much akin to witchcraft. When one stops to think that by merely moving a little knob the size of a pencil he can start one of these devil-wagons, it is almost like tempting the hand of Providence, for in truth——"

"Stop this nonsense—I do not wish to hear a sermon. Tell me at once what your intentions were, and remember, I am in no mood for trifling."

After again giving his chief an unused opportunity to make answer, Luigi once more spoke, in a humble whine. "I can well believe that your honor is not the man to stand trifling, and also we be not the men to trifle. As to our intentions, they were noble and upright. It was the car which was at fault. Once before this evening the steering-gear got out of order. We did not mean to run into you, but as I was asleep at the time, I——"

"I am not asking about the accident. I want to know how you happened to have Nachette in your car."

Bertrand had been aroused by the turning about of the car in which he was napping, and at the sound of the name he stiffened into an alert attention. He could not see the faces of the men from

his seat and so hastened to the ground. The unexpectedness of the last question had taken away even Luigi's loquacity, and he stood with open mouth staring into the bright light which shone in his face. During the time that Luigi had been babbling useless answers Beppo had been seeking to decide upon their true position. He had seen from the first that there was a close understanding between Jack and Nachette, but there was nothing to indicate whether Jack belonged to the Prince's faction or to that of Clarice. A single false step would prove fatal, and yet he could not find a clue which would right him.

The silence was becoming painful, when Bertrand approached the group from behind, grasped the situation in a moment, and said in a voice so calm that it seemed born of ennui: "I see nothing peculiar in this. These are two of my aides, and, as usual when they carry out my instructions, they have been successful."

The explosion of a bomb could have had but little more effect upon the expressions of the various members than did this quiet remark. For a moment all stood silent, and then Jack exclaimed: "Oh, I see it all now! These men are Beppo and Luigi. It is strange that I did not recognize them at once. Bertrand, allow me to compliment you upon the success of your campaign; you may be sure that I shall not forget it, and I also want to shake *your* hands."

Jack heartily shook the limp hands of Beppo and Luigi without noting the look of consternation upon their faces, and then Flossie said: "Well, now that the family reunion is over I move that we get under way for the haunts of civilization. There is a wist-

ful longing in my bosom for coffee and pie and ham sandwiches and ox-tail soup and ice-cream, and if these foods be on the absent list I dare eat all that may become a man."

"True enough," said Jack; "let us hurry back to Genoa. Bertrand, if you will ride in the other car with your aides, I shall look after Nachette."

As Beppo and Luigi prepared to mount, the latter said in a low voice, "This puts us to the necessity of disappointing the Prince."

"Silence, you dolt! It has also robbed us of the glory of the capture. Now I have enough of worry at seeing the fruits of my industry fading away without being forced to listen to your voice. Get in, and if you can sleep, for the love of heaven do so," replied Beppo moodily.

"It is a simple matter to say sleep, but how can a man get any comfort in a thing that is apt to climb a tree or jump off a bank or attempt to go through one of its own fellows? Nevertheless, it is never difficult for me to maintain silence, and you need have no fear of interruptions. Put all your care upon the steering of this work of evil, and if you do bring us safe into port I shall never again complain of the good money I wasted on your education."

Flossie's car took the lead at a fairly rapid pace considering the great load of happiness it bore. Close together upon the roomy back seat, with a large cloak shutting them out from all the world, Nachette and Jack pressed cheek to cheek and told anew the old, sweet story—the story that is told by the pressure of hands and the oft-repeated whispering of that most important word, "Yes." He did not ask her of her journey nor of her captors, nor how she happened to be wearing a peasant's dress.

Had she missed him all the long, lonely time she had been away, and did she truly love him now? These were the questions he asked over and over in an endless variety of forms.

And she did not ask what steps had been taken to find her, or whether the great world had missed her, or how he had happened to be on the same road that night. These things were matters of minor importance, but it seemed as though she could never grow tired of hearing him say that each night while she was in the dreary chateau he had watched the moon rise and had wondered if she too were looking at it, that he had never doubted her for the tiniest, fleeting moment, and that he had loved her all the day and dreamed of her all the night.

As the lights of Genoa flared up on the sky and the chill morning wind rose up out of the sea, she remembered, and with a slight twinge of conscience she asked him if Professor Brahmfelder were very sick.

"No, dearest," he answered after a moment's thought; "he is perfectly well now."

But his tone told her, and with a broken voice she asked him for the details of his last moments. Word by word the situation was explained, and then Jack, because his own heart was true, put a kindly interpretation on Beppo's ruse. "They wished to bring you home, dearest, and knew that you would start if you thought a friend was suffering. And no doubt they also thought that this would prepare you for the truth. He spoke of you at the last, and these good men were with him then. He was content to go, sweetheart, and you must not begrudge him his rest."

Then Jack took the weeping girl in his arms and comforted her as the car sped on into the city.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"AND is it really Paris—are you sure that it is Paris?"

With tear-blinded eyes turned upon him and hand pressing his, Nachette asked Jack the question as though even yet she feared that it was all a dream. The detectives had gone on by train, but the balance of the party had elected to make the trip in the big touring-car.

"Yes, dearest, it is really Paris, and oh, but it seems ages since last I saw you here!"

"And it seems twice as many ages to me as to you," answered Nachette. "I am so afraid that something will happen even yet to keep me from Clarice—dear, dear Clarice! I shall never again do a thing to worry her."

As they drew nearer and nearer to the little house where Clarice was living, Nachette became ever more eager. Her eyes were moist and tender, but a radiant smile was upon her lips, and when at last Jack pointed out the house, still some distance down the street, she clapped her hands like a child and said: "Oh, my heart feels as though it would break through my bosom! I am glad that you are with me. I should never in the world be able to stand the joy of meeting you both at once after all I have gone through away from you."

A tall man in dazzling raiment was standing on

the sidewalk in front of the house, and as soon as he was able to make sure of the identity of the car he hastened in, and by the time they reached it Clarice was at the gate with Bertrand and his two aides drawn up in solemn array behind her. Bertrand had taken his place as chief without a struggle. He had assumed such an unquestioning assurance that Beppo trembled for fear his duplicity should be discovered; and as Luigi listened to Bertrand's account of the numberless agencies which he had put in motion, and the absolute certainty of the exact moment that his methods would have to succeed, he was so filled with awe that he was unable to sift the real from the false or to clearly recall the part which he himself had taken. Clarice had been filled with thanks so profound that there was nothing in her power which she would not have done for them, and she had rewarded them far above their expectations. A liberal share of this windfall had been invested in raiment, and the result was overpowering.

As the car stopped at the curb Nachette gave one look at the deep lines in the face of her old nurse, and then the tears began to flow. Clarice dashed to the side of the car and took her in her arms, murmuring incoherent sounds which told far more than any words could have done. With one accord the men turned away, Luigi going so far as to sob audibly behind a silk handkerchief of generous size and gaudy hue. And then, with the exception of Flossie and his man, they all entered the house, where Nachette told her side of the story, Bertrand's quick imagination supplying the details which were lacking.

And as they talked together there would ofttimes

come a moment's silence as they thought of the quaint personality which had become so dear to them and whose absence seemed so hard at the period of their rejoicing. Luigi was called upon to give his account of the last moments of the little man with the great soul, and he did so with a sincere simplicity generally foreign to his wordy discourses. "'And he looked up into my face with those deep, honest eyes of his like the eyes of the good dog who once saved my life, and I took his hand and he pressed mine. 'It is more beautiful even than the music of Nachette,' he said. 'It is so beautiful that it pains my heart, but I would not have it stop—it is so beautiful!' and then he smiled and just faded away like a lamp which had used up its oil. I closed his eyes and smoothed his hair and folded his hands across his breast, and then while Beppo went to fetch the doctor I sat beside his bed and prayed; but I did not pray for him, I prayed that when it came my time to go I might go as easily. It is a blessed thing to have the angels sent after one's soul. I would I might have heard the music. He was an honest man—I could tell by his eyes—and he said that I had a magnificent voice which would command notice even in the largest choir. Ah, well, it is a——"

Clarice, Nachette, Jack, and Romola were all in tears, but as Luigi emerged from the reverence with which the Professor's death had filled him, and settled comfortably into one of his generalizing discourses, Beppo deftly smote him on the shin with the walking-stick which was now constantly within his grasp. They talked it over as soon as they had regained their composure, and decided that while they would prefer to have a quiet funeral,

his wide acquaintance demanded that his many friends be offered the opportunity to show their respect for one who had placed so many feet upon the ladder, and who in all his life had never done anything mean or underhand.

Presently Bertrand and his aides, with hats at an imposing angle and sticks carried jauntily in their hands, left the house and strolled over to the boulevard. In all Paris there was no stranger trio. Beppo envied Bertrand the glory of having found Nachette, Bertrand envied Beppo the right to it, while all that Luigi asked was the privilege of expressing his thoughts, but even this was denied him; yet they sauntered along in their new clothes, illuminating their conversation with copious gesture, and making candid comment upon the houses they passed and the people they met.

As they turned into the Boulevard des Italiens a small man with exceedingly bright eyes approached them. He was shabbily dressed, and was so emaciated that he seemed at the point of starvation. As he saw Bertrand he paused in astonishment, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him: "And to think that years ago I bought this man a bowl of soup to keep his soul within his body!"

"Well, my good man," said Bertrand in the flowery, patronizing tones common to all who have climbed high through their own unaided efforts, "and what can I do for you?"

"'My good man'!" echoed the stranger. "Bertrand the vagabond addresses Pierre Du Val as 'My good man'! Fate ever must have her joke! Yes, you can do something for me. Tell me if it was from drinking absinthe that you gained the wealth you now seem to possess?"

"Pierre Du Val! Pierre Du Val! Man, I thought you were dead a dozen years ago! One cannot drink vermouth the way you did and survive. Absinthe, now—but this is not the time nor the place —come."

Without more ado Bertrand led the way to a clothier's, where an excellent outfit was procured for his newly found friend; and then after a trip to the barber's and another to the Turkish baths Pierre Du Val presented an entirely different appearance. As Luigi noted the vast improvement, which extended even to carriage and expression, he nodded a frank approval and said sagely: "My uncle, who was a philosopher of no slight reputation, used to say: 'Clothes do not make the man, yet, by our Lady, they give him an opportunity to make himself.' Thou couldst borrow a piece of gold now from the same man who would not have given thee a pleasant look an hour ago."

"And now for a dinner," said Bertrand, who beamed on his old friend as though he were a creation of his own. They repaired to a fashionable restaurant, where Bertrand ordered a repast of ample proportions. A heated discussion arose as to the wines and liqueurs, Bertrand and Du Val having markedly different tastes but equally strong convictions. Finally Luigi proposed the compromise of ordering to suit both, and as this was the only apparent way to settle a discussion which seemed about to tear them asunder, it was carried out.

"By the way," said Du Val, "to what do you owe your rise in the world?"

There was never yet a well-dressed, well-fed man who could not answer this question in a manner

which threw the searchlight into every darkest corner and blazed a way for all ambitious young men to follow. Bertrand leaned back in his chair and toyed with his glass a moment before he answered, in a voice made purposely humble in order to spare the feelings of his less capable audience. Blessed is he who can enjoy the luxury of magnanimity.

"First of all to forming the habit of relying entirely upon method and never trusting anything to chance; next to my conviction that in the end worth always gets its true reward, therefore I could do my duty with my whole heart and not spend precious moments in idle bickering for fear that what I might do for another would not react to my own welfare. Then my wide knowledge of men and the care I used in selecting those whom I chose as subordinates, have proved of inestimable value to me; but above all I owe my success to industry, which never slept with a task undone to haunt it."

Bertrand paused amid an impressive silence. Once more the old respect which Beppo had felt for him was returning and driving out the jealousy before it, while the admiration of Du Val was boundless. "And to think that you were able to hide all this from me through the long years of our friendship! I can now tell you candidly that I never saw into your depth, but always took you for the surface vagabond you seemed."

"It is ever so," said Bertrand with a graceful gesture. "As a rule appreciation is left for the mourners, and if now and again one who has remained steadfast to his ideals is able to close his life with a modicum of his due already paid, it is only to stimulate those who see to a renewed effort.

And now tell me of yourself. When we parted, if I remember rightly, you had just finished the opera which was to make your name a talisman in the world of music. I laid most of your words to the effect of vermouth, yet I always felt from the scenario which you gave me that there might after all be something back of it."

The eyes of Du Val flashed fire, and he straightened up in his chair. "Worth always gets its true reward!" he exclaimed bitterly. "If this were true, then were every dream of mine a reality. And work! Man, I have gone for days without food and have worked, worked, worked until my brain would swoon; and what is the result? I have written an opera too grand for human voice to interpret; I have conceived a thing which was doomed from the beginning to be either a colossal success or a colossal failure. Year after year I have lived with but one end in view—the finding of a man who would dare to put my opera to the test; and they have scoffed at me, they have called me madman, and dreamer, and vermouth-fiend, until I myself have almost believed that my own mind was at fault and not theirs. And yet I can stand afar off and see the glory and the grandeur of it still. Oh, life has been a mill and my soul has been but a grist!"

"And did no one ever approve your opera?" asked Bertrand in real sympathy.

"Only one, and he too was poor—the Herr Professor Brahmfelder. He too saw the possibilities of my work."

"He was a great judge of music," interposed Luigi, glad of an opportunity to take a part in the conversation; but Beppo with a quick movement

placed his heel upon his friend's toe and prevented a repetition of the Professor's approbation of Luigi's voice.

"Yes," answered Du Val, turning to Luigi, "he was a real judge of music. I had but lately heard of his rise in the world and had come to see him. I find that he is dead, and now I too am willing to die, because none other will listen to me. The world has no time for an old crank in rags."

"Rags?" asked Bertrand.

"I beg you pardon, m'sieur. I had forgotten, and yet this kindness of yours lifted me for a moment above the clouds of my despair. I shall forget myself and bask in the sunshine which filters through the good fortune of my friend. M'sieur, I drink to your very good health."

After their glasses were again lowered, Du Val asked Bertrand what his present position was. "It is one in which the joy is scarcely equal to the pain, for I am filling—or at least in my poor way trying to fill—the place of our late dear friend, the Herr Professor Brahmfelder. I am the manager of that greatest of all stars, Nachette."

Du Val stared at him. Once more the light of hope blazed in his eyes. "Would—do you think that she would listen to my opera?"

"Well, of course that would be as my own judgment dictates. I am willing to listen to it, and if it offers any opportunities I may do much for you. If I remember, the principal character was a heathen goddess——"

"Ah, that is true! A beautiful human story runs through it all, but the great glory is with this heathen goddess. I have tried a dozen voices, but they were unable to carry the score, and yet it can-

not be simplified because about it are built all the grand choruses. I could have sold it if I had been willing to let the musical carpenters fit it to the capacity of the average voice, but if there is no voice which can sing it as it is, it will never be sung—it will never be sung."

"Are the words of the goddess important?"

"No, of course not. Words are only suggestions in an opera. The musician, the true musician, rises so far above the words that they hinder rather than help him. Why, with the action and the music I care not if the goddess speak a single word. I have tried to have it sung without words in order to save the voice. I have tried to have two different primadonnas sing it alternately, but I have not yet found the singer. I shall die with it still unsung."

Bertrand sat in meditation, while Du Val watched him with hungry expectancy. "We do not know that the spirits use words," mused rather than said Bertrand. "Ofttimes we get impressions which comprise more than could be said by many words. May it not be that the spirits use this manner of communion? Yes; well, then, why would it not be natural for a goddess to give expression to her wishes, not by word of human tongue, but by the more spiritual medium of music?"

"Yes, yes; but still——"

"Then if your opera be as great as you think it, I shall give you an opportunity to prove it. Fetch me to-morrow the score of the goddess, and when I try it I can tell you what its fate will be."

"It will cost a vast sum to stage the opera."

"Vast sums are not feared when vast incomes may result. Make no mistake; if the thing is not feasible I shall not have aught to do with it. I

cannot risk my reputation by a failure. Now here is a sum of money to last you until the funeral of our friend, and after that we shall see. And now come for a stroll on the boulevard. It is no bad thing to let your acquaintances see that you are not without influential friends. Au revoir."

Beppo and Luigi sat at the table for a long time, drinking their wine in quiet content. "The child gazes upon the horse and thinks it a mighty beast, yet doth the horse tremble for fear the elephant may trample upon him," began Luigi as the waters of his imagination gathered and overflowed the dam of his control. "All my life I have been looking up to some one, and yet no sooner do I find one whose intellect seems to move with the truest precision, than I come upon another who throws a shadow even upon him whom I thought must rank with the greatest."

"And whom have you found now?" asked Beppo testily.

"This Bertrand is of a depth which I can never hope to fathom. He seems to get things by the mere wishing for them."

"Yet it was I who found Nachette."

"I too had some little hand in the matter—you must not forget that it was my foresight in taking the watch from the gendarme that led us to the victory—and yet I and you also are regarded merely as the tools of Bertrand. I say he is a great man, yet there is a fire in the eyes of that pauper whom he turned into a grand signor which only requires a small bit of blowing to make a mighty roar. It is a strange world."

"Do you or do you not think Bertrand a greater man than I?" asked Beppo jealously.

"Well," answered Luigi slowly, as though he hated to wound his fellow but still felt compelled to render justice, "I have always marveled at your wit, yet have I seen you when you could not find a lie to save your reputation, while Signor Bertrand ever seems to have twenty noble lies where even the truth would have been ample."

CHAPTER XXIX

IF humanity could find no other testimony in life, the lasting and widespread influence of those who had been ever unselfish, in contrast to the fleeting and narrow influence of those who had made no sacrifices save to their own vanity, would point to the final, inevitable victory of goodness over evil.

In life Professor Brahmfelder had gone quietly on his way, his strong, tender soul hidden within a comical little body, which had sadly handicapped him in the full display of his brilliant talents; but now that he was gone he was judged by the heart and not by the eyes. His own pathway had been rough and ofttimes wearisome, yet he had strewed with flowers the pathway of many another, and now they gathered to show that the world is wrong to doubt that the world is better than it seems.

At first it had been planned to hold the services in the small house where Nachette was living, but as the news spread, and newspaper after newspaper carried on the message with ever widening circles, the inquiries began to pour in, until the impresarios of Europe took the matter into their own hands, and the coffin which held all that was mortal of Professor Brahmfelder rested in state within the Temple of Music.

Telegrams from all over the round world were re-

ceived by the committee, flowers in wondrous profusion were sent, and on the day of the funeral the masters of music, the humble rank and file, and those who received rather than gave of it, all gathered to do honor to him who had served with the skill of the master and with the humility of the priest.

Luigi had conceived a veneration for the dead man which was truly remarkable. He spent much of his time close to the somber catafalque which stood at the far end of the great hall like an altar awaiting its offering, and on the morning of the final services he saw a tall, stately lady enter the building, and after a glance of indecision come rapidly up and place a blood-red rose on the black coffin, from which all other flowers had been kept. Seeing the supervision which Luigi seemed to take of the entire place, she asked him if her rose might be permitted to rest where she had placed it. As Luigi examined her dignified carriage a conviction took possession of him, and he nodded his head and turned his face away. The lady leaned close to the pall and whispered, "I did love you, but I found it out too late."

A sob had made her words audible, and Luigi had heard. He turned quickly and faced her with indignant accusation on his face. "Are you the one who married the soldier because he was of great size?" he asked in a stern voice.

The startled woman stepped back a pace, but said in a low tone, "I am."

"Then have you kept a speech he would have given half his life to have heard. Upon his deathbed he spoke of you, and said that in all his life he had not been loved of a woman. Now I myself

know much of the ways of love, and I tell you that here was a man whose love was as a diamond of great price, and you were like a child of ignorance who tossed it aside to take a glass ball because it was larger. Yet the loss was your own, and I pity you."

"Yes, the loss was mine. Were you a friend of his?"

"Was I a friend of his?" Luigi's voice was low but almost fierce in its intensity. "Madame, it was I who held his hand at the last, it was I to whom he spoke his last words, it was I who closed his eyes when it was all over—his deep, honest eyes, like the eyes of that good dog who once saved my life."

"And you say that he thought of me at the end?"

"Yes; and so great was his soul that he bore you no malice, but only wondrous love. He said that you had not made his life bitter, but had kept it youthful, and that his heart was always like the heart of a lad upon the verge of manhood. I have seen many a soul leave the body, but never such a glorious departure as was his." Luigi paused and came close to the veiled lady. "He heard the angels singing, and hastened to meet them with a smile on his lips."

No longer able to restrain her emotion, she turned to leave the room, but after walking half-way to the door, she paused and came hurriedly back to Luigi. Handing him a card with an address upon it, she said: "Here, my friend, I know not your position, but if ever you should need another friend, perhaps I can help you. I know that I can trust anyone whom he trusted. Now I must go or I may attract attention."

"Don't worry about that. Thousands of women have wept upon the coffin of this man who all his life hungered for a small trifle of woman's love. There have been tears enough shed in this hall to float a gondola. You are not apt to attract attention; but I thank you for your offer of friendship, and in his name I bid you rest assured that you are the only woman he loved, and that he was never sorry for it."

"There is no name upon the card; if you need me, ask for the Woman of the Red Rose."

After she had left Luigi's stride took on a more decided strut, until of a sudden he stood still with a look of perplexity on his face. "Now, then, what did she mean by that? She knew not my position —by our Lady, I begin to believe that she took me for his valet. If there be finer clothes in Paris than mine, I have yet to see them. Well, I blame neither the little Professor nor the tall soldier. I swear there was a subtle charm about her which was beginning to make a small stir in my own heart."

All the morning they came there in throngs, the high and the low, prima-donnas and stage hands; they came with sad faces and soft footsteps, and eyes which seemed to be fastened upon memory rather than upon the realities about them. Many others sought to leave a flower upon the coffin, but to all these Luigi made a stern refusal.

Shortly after noon the formal services began with a mighty chorus in which nearly every one present took part. Then followed short and simple discourses by men celebrated in both hemispheres. Next came another soul-stirring chorus, and at its close several of the stars of highest magnitude arose and told of some simple act of kindness upon

the part of him in honor of whom they had gathered to pay their last respects. This seemed to break down the few remaining barriers of formality; the entire concourse was brought into closest communion through the mutual bond which held them to one who had passed over into peace, and they spoke as they would have spoken within the circle of the fireside.

A grand musical finale had been arranged for the end, but as the moment arrived when the services must be brought to a close, a tall man stepped upon the platform where the catafalque was erected and held up his hand for silence. He was a man well known to all of them, and a long service amidst care and worry had given him a short temper which had become a by-word. But now his usually taciturn face was illumined by a tender smile which seemed to take them all into his confidence. "Friends," he said, putting all its full, rich meaning into the word, "this is not a funeral service. We are not gathered here to say a last farewell to one we are about to lose forever. We are simply standing upon the wharf, waving our handkerchiefs and wishing God-speed to a tired comrade who is to receive a royal welcome at the end of his journey. Often before has he started forth alone, but always he found himself among friends, and always he sent back a cheery word to those he had left behind. There is no doubt but that he is sending it now. Let us not show long faces at this good fortune which has come to him; let us sing no dirge; let us rather show faces of good cheer and joy, and sing the song which has been for years the symbol of friendship—let us sing 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

And they did sing it. With tears rolling down cheeks, but with faces bright and smiling, they sang from the heart, and as the great volume of beautiful melody rolled up into the sky above them, who can tell how far it soared or when the last sweet echo died away?

The services at the grave were very short and simple, but the great crowd which had followed the body to its last resting-place seemed loath to leave. Oddly assorted pairs might be seen strolling about the grounds, forgetting for the time the different planes upon which their everyday lives were lived, and meeting upon the perfect level of a common memory.

Nachette and Clarice had finally driven away under the care of Jack, but Bertrand and his two aides still stood beside the grave. As they waited thus they were approached by the tall man who had made the closing remarks. He was an American manager and well known to Bertrand, although Bertrand himself was not remembered. Mr. Kasting walked up to Bertrand and held out his hand, saying frankly: "You have been pointed out to me as the successor of our friend, and I am glad to make your acquaintance. My name is Kasting."

"I am delighted to meet you, m'sieur, and you may be sure that your face needs no introduction to any one in musical circles. Shall we not start to return?"

As they walked along they very naturally fell into a discussion of the possibilities which the coming season held. Bertrand had the absorbent qualities of the perfect listener, and it was not long before Kasting was telling him of his hopes and ambitions. "I should like," he said in the tone of

half apology which one assumes when exhibiting a castle in Spain to a still unproven confidant, "I should like to be the one to bring out a new opera which would contain enough novelty to stamp me with the courage of the pioneer and yet be upon a level high enough to command the most profound respect. I say I should like to do this, but I hardly expect to be able to do so."

"We all have our secret ambitions which even our closest friends may only see at moments when some great stress has thrown open the door to our inmost chamber. My ambition is akin to yours, but I fully expect to realize mine," replied Bertrand. The tone of Bertrand was distant enough to arouse curiosity, close enough to invite interrogation.

In a few moments the two men were engaged in an earnest discussion of Du Val's opera. Bertrand had developed wonderfully under the warm light of prosperity. It was as though his old youth with its glittering dreams had returned to him. He realized his own short-comings and knew that this was his last and only chance. He had perfectly grasped the peculiar lack of balance in the character of Nachette; her childlike and impulsive side and her passionate woman's nature had received as close study as had her marvelous musical ability. He knew the uncertainty of his position, and he also knew that by no set purpose of his will could he ever have climbed to the place he now held, or ever recover it once it was lost. Most of us seek to be judged at our own valuation; Bertrand had tried to accept himself at the valuation of those with whom he came into contact. He had learned to maintain silence, and when he did speak his words were chosen with painful care.

He had put his whole being into a possible interpretation of Du Val's opera, and while he saw that failure hovered in its path, success meant the establishment of a reputation which would be unassailable. Now, to every objection which Kasting brought against the opera he had a clear argument to offset it. As the possibilities loomed before Kasting he became excited, but Bertrand was as calm as certainty, as cold as ice. Not in the slightest measure did he invite co-operation on the part of Kasting; he made it perfectly plain that he was simply returning confidence for confidence, and that their kindred ambitions alone had made him speak of the success which he seemed assured was to crown his own.

Finally Kasting asked to be allowed to see the opera. Bertrand refused in a kindly way which did not put an irrevocable end to the matter, and before their journey was ended it was arranged that as soon as Nachette felt equal to it Kasting was to be allowed to hear her play the score of the goddess.

As Bertrand, with a strange expression upon his face, stood on the curb watching the carriage disappearing in the distance, Du Val approached and asked in an anxious voice if there was any news as yet. The two men gazed into each other's eyes, the look in Du Val's eager and pleading, that in Bertrand's veiled and secretive. Both men knew that the fire of excess had consumed much of the strongest portions of their natures; both men realized that life's treasures must be gathered soon or never; and their faces were as the faces of men who in a lonely boat see the water getting lower and lower.

"Du Val," said Bertrand at last, "I have done more than any other man in the world could have done, and I am not discouraged; but for that bowl of soup which you bought me long ago I mean to do the best I can for you—and it is an awful thing to be crushed beneath the weight of falling hopes. Keep your mind on other things. Here is money for the next week."

And Bertrand turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XXX

THE rehearsals were drawing to a close, the first throes of organization were over, and the piece had been pressed into unity and cohesion. Bertrand had worked with tireless energy, and Du Val had seemed propelled by an inward fire, the flame of which could be seen through his eyes. Kasting had been so impressed by the power of the opera that he had decided to make its American engagement doubly sure by presenting it after a great Parisian triumph. At first he had been skeptical as to having a score rendered by a violin. "It can never be played upon an instrument," he had said. "It will not be played," answered Bertrand with the enigmatical expression that had become habitual and which was so baffling, "it will be sung." And when Kasting had sat with throbbing heart while Nachette, with the closed eyes which gave her dark face a weird expression, had given herself to her violin and it had sung the words, it almost seemed to him that he could understand them, and he was lifted into an enthusiasm which no rehearsal had ever given him before.

The wavering failures of Bertrand's life had at last focused upon this one possible success, and he was a new man. A certain cynical chill in his manner aroused the interest and commanded the respect of those who came into contact with him,

and he settled questions with an impassive finality which gave strength and unity to the production. But there was one question which baffled him, and that was the disposal of Beppo and Luigi. Nachette had insisted that as far as possible the late Professor's wishes should be carried out, and after starting the education of Pietro and the girl she had demanded that places be found for Beppo and Luigi.

Beppo had claimed to be a cornetist, and Luigi had also admitted that he could perform upon the tuba. But when they took their places in the orchestra it was quickly discovered that neither was in any sense a musician. Beppo's notes were irregular and blatant, while Luigi, using his great lungs to their full capacity, turned his part into a solo which overran the playing of the remaining members. Then Bertrand gave Beppo a part of two sentences: "The goddess comes. Fall on your knees and worship her." Luigi was to be dressed as an ancient hero, in fleshings and a lion-skin robe, but he had no words. He was sorely hurt at this treatment, and each time that Beppo struck his attitude and gave his words Luigi would drop the ponderous club which he carried and disconcert his friend until the entire scene was threatened.

Finally Bertrand was forced to relegate him to the mechanical force; but the soul of Luigi rebelled at this, and with the pouting look of a spoiled child he sought Nachette and laid his troubles before her. Nachette was blissfully happy these days. Her part in the opera was strong and unique and stirred her to her depths, Clarice appeared satisfied that Jack was the soul of honor and always treated him with a tender kindliness, while, above all, her own

love for Jack grew daily richer and more beautiful.

"Upon his death-bed he told me that my voice was one of the grandest which he had ever heard—and his eyes were honest like the eyes of that good dog who saved my life," said Luigi. "This Bertrand, I know he is a great man, and yet I do not think he is a great judge of music, and furthermore he is jealous of me. Why can I not say the speech which Beppo does so poorly? He will spoil the entire production, while if I were allowed to say it, or, still better, to sing it, I should get encore after encore. My voice is of great power."

"Well, if Beppo is apt to ruin the entire production," said Nachette with an amused smile, "I certainly must do something to save it; but if you would get encore after encore, I fear that you would deprive me of my own share of applause."

"Ah, no," answered Luigi with a reassuring smile, "you are not one of the singers. I admit that some of them will be hard put to it, but you—you are like the high mountain. A small fence may cast a shadow upon a smaller flower, but it cannot hide the high mountain."

"Let me hear your voice," said Nachette, hiding her tendency to laugh.

"Ah, that is what I expected! Now listen. I should not creep out and say in a squeaky chirp, 'The goddess comes. Fall on your knees and worship her.' I should stalk to the center of the stage, hold up my hand and frown with great fierceness, and then sing, 'The goddess comes,' holding that last word until the house shook. 'Fall on your knees and wor-r-r-ship her-r-r, the goddess, the goddess, the goddess co-o-o-mes. Fall on your knees, fall on your knees, fall on your knees and

wor-r-r-ship her-r-r.' See what a grand entrance it will give you."

They were in the small parlor of the house where Nachette had found Clarice on her return to Paris, and as Luigi threw back his head and opened his mighty voice to its full capacity, the very foundations seemed to tremble. But a strange thing had happened. The abnormal ear of Nachette had caught the marvelous power of Luigi's voice, had caught and had found its place. There was not a thread of music in it as he used it, but the music was there, and she longed to play upon it as though it were an instrument. Taking a 'cello which stood in the corner, she played certain deep tones and made him sing the words to them. Over and over she played, until his dull ear began to respond. She made him go through it again in a soft tone until he followed the chanting melody she had formed. He looked into her eyes like some charmed beast, and his own eyes glistened as he saw the approbation grow in hers. Finally telling him to come at the same hour on the morrow, she dismissed him. On the following day, however, a half-hour before her appointment, she was surprised by a visit from Beppo.

"It is indeed a thing I hate to do," he began, "but this Luigi is like to ruin the opera yet. You do not know what he has in his mind to do."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Nachette, in mock tragedy, the sarcasm of which glided harmlessly from Beppo's round shoulders, "but it is terrible to feel that one's success is hanging by only a single thread. Still, as long as you and M'sieur Bertrand are on watch all may yet be well."

"Indeed, yes, if only some plan is made to con-

trol Luigi. He nearly ruined my own part by his awkwardness, and now he has the effrontery to say that he intends to take it himself and *sing* it. His voice is like the roaring of a sick bear, and the horror of it is unspeakable. Something must be done with him or all our hopes will be blasted."

"Indeed, we must be careful," said Nachette, humoring him. "What would you suggest?"

"Now the only thing to do is to get him entirely out of the way. I have tried my best to fit him for the society of the cultured, for he has a good heart, yet he is so headstrong that I have given it up. If now we could send him on a long journey until after the first performance, that would settle the matter, but I should not be at ease with him in Paris. He has a voice the power of which is like the clamor of an engine and the tone is like the groaning of a resined board; and one can never tell what he might do, for his head is turned and reason no longer dwells there."

"Let me hear you give your part."

"'The goddess comes! Fall on your knees and worship her.'" The voice of Beppo was high-pitched and shrill, but it possessed good carrying capacity. There was not the slightest stimulus in his manner of giving the speech, and Nachette was forced to coincide with Luigi in his criticism; but she caught the tone in Beppo's voice which perfectly balanced the heavy booming voice of his friend. Taking her violin, and fitting the notes to supplement Beppo's, she taught him to sing the speech, and he had just learned it when Luigi arrived. When he entered the room the two stared at each other in frank disapproval. "I congratulate you," said Luigi after a moment's silence. "I see that

you have acted on my advice and have come to offer your resignation."

"As usual, your great conceit has blinded your eyes to the truth. I have come to consult with the great Nachette, and she has decided that my speech can be best given to music."

"If the music be loud enough, I grant you it will be a vast improvement; but I cannot help but believe that the plan which myself and the great Nachette formed but yesterday is the correct one."

"Now I want you to sing it as a duet," said Nachette soothingly. "Your voices will harmonize perfectly, and it will be most impressive."

"I am willing to do whatever adds to your pleasure, but I never thought the time would come when my voice would need help from such a feeble squeak as this. The Signor Professor himself said that of all the voices he had ever heard, mine was the grandest, that it had the volume and power of a mighty chorus; and here I must sing my rôle with that squeak tacked on like a street-cleaner's cart fastened behind a passenger-train. I know that I am not in charge of this opera, but if I had my say——"

"If you had your say, your full say, there would be no words left unused for another to curse you with. Have you no respect for the great Nachette? I should not blame her if she turned you adrift to starve," cried Beppo.

Luigi's face was just beginning to light with his answering retort when Nachette hastened to say: "Now, come, while I play the 'cello I want you to sing the words together. Begin low and increase the power used each time."

In his eagerness to prove his ability to drown the

voice of his friend, Luigi threw back his head, and, starting a few notes off the key, he filled the small room with a volume of noise which was deafening. Beppo's thin treble struggled and fought like a lone gull beating against the winter's gale, until, acknowledging defeat, he paused, and picking up a small chair he struck his friend a smart blow across the shoulders. Luigi did not pause, but with head still thrown back and voice singing, "Fall on your knees," he seized the chair by his left hand and Beppo's throat by his right, and as he forced Beppo to illustrate his words, he fastened his eyes upon Nachette, and with the fervor of adoration chanted, "Fall on your knees and worship her."

Almost convulsed with laughter, Nachette forced them apart and after much persuasion finally induced them to resume, and in the end their practice was fairly successful.

During the first weeks of rehearsal Jack had been occupied in adjusting his own affairs. He found that a chain of events which baffled explanation had forced the temporary tightening. He more than half suspected that the Prince was at the bottom of it, but as he could bring no tangible proof, and as the Prince had left for some big-game shooting in Central Africa, he contented himself with putting his affairs once more in good order and conducting his suit for the hand of Nachette.

This was already won as far as Nachette herself was concerned, but Clarice with all a clever woman's subtleness refused to recognize anything stronger than friendship, and while she invariably treated Jack with the most considerate courtesy, she so far took him into her confidence as to presume that he perfectly well understood the handi-

cap it would give Nachette's career if she were to marry. In many ways she forced Jack to act almost as her ally in this regard, and his own conscientious tendency to admit a truth, coupled with the natural straightforwardness of his disposition, made this plan easy of accomplishment.

Thus, while Jack and Nachette were often alone, and while they felt that there was no doubt of their ultimate union, there was always between them the knowledge that Clarice, calm and implacable, opposed their wish with all the earnestness of her strong nature. Therefore, while Jack did all he could to foster the success of the opera, he could have heard of its failure with less chagrin than he would have been willing to confess.

Paris, and through Paris the musical world, was anxiously awaiting the opening production. In some manner the knowledge that Nachette had undergone a romantic experience became more than a rumor, and while no one seemed to be able to give much authentic information, nearly every one was willing to add a few suspicions to the general impression, and the very mystery of it increased the desire to see Nachette once more and in a new rôle.

The name of Du Val was altogether unknown, as was also that of Bertrand, and yet the imposing assurance of the latter and the equally imposing intensity of the former seemed to indicate personality of a high order, and personality is the one attribute which defies a challenge. On the other hand, the name of the celebrated Kasting was proof positive that the production held promise of great things. If any further inducement were needed, the cast, which included many well known artists, supplied it.

As the cast of the opera was originally drawn up with its delicate questions of priority, the names of Beppo and Luigi had not appeared. There had been much friction between them during the rehearsals, but as usual they stood back to back against a common affront. They hastened to Nachette, who found endless amusement in the peculiar bond which held together such warring natures. They found her in the little parlor where they had received their training, and Beppo said: "Surely it cannot be that the great Nachette knows of the slight which has been put upon us?"

"What is this slight? I have not heard of it."

"We who have labored for the success of the opera from the beginning—even throwing aside our regular vocation in order to enter more heartily into this new one—we have not been named in the cast." The voice of Beppo was shrill with indignation.

"Of a truth it is so," said Luigi; "and when we protested, they said that by right we belonged to the chorus only, and were not entitled to special mention."

"And this is true," said Nachette with her usual kind voice and frank treatment of every question. "Still, there is always the other side to make its own argument. In the first place, you have created an entrance which is much stronger than it was originally and therefore are entitled to special mention, but there are no other names in the cast which have not already a fair fame of their own, and this counts for much."

"Fair fame! And is it then nothing to possess the grandest voice which the great Signor Professor Brahmfelder had ever heard in a life spent in the search of grand voices—and violin-players? I am not conceited, nor am I vain, but I do want

that which is mine by right. And then here is Beppo, who has by nature a voice like the squeaking of a young mouse, and yet with your help has he been able to make a noise with it that brings out to a fuller extent the marvelous power of my own voice. I should rather lose my hand than do aught which would mar your success, yet were it not for this I should wipe the dirt of Paris from my shoes and leave them to find two others who can fill our place, and I told this upstart of a Du Val the very same. Who is he to take upon himself the rôle of dictator? When first I saw him he looked like the shadow of an evil memory. His clothing was like the rags a rat uses to build her nest, his eyes stuck out upon his face like the raisins upon a white tart in the hand of a child, and there was naught in his body to keep the sides of his stomach from growing fast together. And now look at what made him: Nachette was able to play the opera which none could sing; Bertrand was able to give the opportunity because he was the manager of Nachette; but where would Nachette have been had it not been for our skill, yea, and for our honesty? We say but little, yet there was a strong temptation brought to bear against us. Very well, if this is the return which is to be made for all our sacrifice, I shall simply stay until I have made this success also sure, and then I shall go back to where worth is more appreciated. I do not make complaint, I simply bear in silence as much as I may——"

"As you say," interposed Beppo, "silence best becomes you. The Lady Nachette has something to say. Peace!"

And Nachette with a grave face but with dancing eyes promised to do what she could in the matter.

CHAPTER XXXI

AGAIN the Opéra Comique was packed to the doors to listen to the playing of Nachette; but this time there was a marked difference in the prevailing expectancy. Before, the lovers of music had gathered to enjoy the finished work of great artists, and to smile indulgently at the efforts of a school-girl who had pleased the fancy of an old man. Now there was an undercurrent of expectancy, which did not doubt the genius or the talent of this girl who seemed to have found the royal road to the Temple of Fame. But still there was an abundance of curiosity to keep interest at the highest pitch. Could a violin compete with the human voice? Who was this new composer, this Du Val, who was said to have materialized with the same spontaneous perfection that Nachette had shown? And last, but strongest of all, had this secret romance through which rumor said that Nachette had but recently gone made a noticeable change in her appearance or playing?

A sigh of relief went up as the orchestra began the overture. Du Val was a mystic and delighted in weird music which seemed to suggest rocky ravines and bleak, storm-swept moors, and awful forces fighting for human souls. He had begun his opera at the period when youth, having destroyed its great joy in life through over-indulgence, is

ready to believe and to preach that there is nothing left but shams and ashes and wormwood; but as he had written, he had been lifted out of himself. Superstitious in a broad, cynical way, religious also in a narrow and semi-unconscious fashion, and still retaining a quaintly chivalrous adoration for what he discriminatingly styled a "good woman," Du Val had offered himself to his Muse, and his Muse had greedily accepted the sacrifice.

As he wrote, he experienced the peculiar dual personality of creative genius. More and more he saw that while his characters drew their life from him, he had no control of their movements except the small and unsatisfactory one of putting an end to their existence. Part of him seemed to become a machine which worked out in wondering surprise the strange doings of these real characters of his imagination, while the other part of him looked on in what at times was bitter criticism. He wanted his vicious characters to be altogether hideous and his good characters to be altogether lovely, but alas! they were as imperfect as the souls which he met in the flesh. He was ofttimes, in fact generally, under the influence of vermouth, and at these times he wrote things which he himself did not fully understand, but which filled him with awe when he read them in the gray moments of his nervous sobriety. His religion and his superstition merged and fused and welded together in the character of Vrienska, the goddess of the Kraneskio.

Into her his peculiar susceptibility to the mysterious was poured, but softened and glorified by his conception of the ideal woman, and as she moved across the pages of his opera she became the materialization of his own deity. Absolutely pure and

above temptation herself, she was cold and severe at first, until she became touched with love for the shepherd of Scenda mountain. When the shepherd smiled disdainfully at her suit and remained true to his own peasant sweetheart, Vrienska then proved that a goddess scorned and a woman scorned demonstrate the same truth about the emotion known as fury. In the fierce war which she waged against the dwellers upon Scenda, the shepherd, who had successfully resisted her love, could not stand the loss of his little flock and the small treasure his thrift had saved, and offered to become her lover if she would bring peace once more. This sordid smallness filled Vrienska with disgust without destroying her capacity for love, and in the end her heart was touched by the unfaltering self-sacrifice of the shepherd's sweetheart and she blessed Mount Scenda above all the earth.

No more than the ancient soil knows about the cultivation of grass did Du Val understand the various elements from which he had drawn his inspiration, but in the end, when his goddess tempered her justice with sympathy, judged the day's work by the strength of the worker, and allowed each one to drink from the spring of joy with his own cup, he had fallen upon his knees before her and had remained there ever since. No one knew better than himself that love nor sorrow nor sin nor virtue can be judged, any more than it can be regulated, by a fixed standard, and when his Muse found this bitterly learned lesson written upon the tablets of his experience, and took and worked it over and put it into the spirit of the goddess Vrienska, Du Val could not recognize his own share, but was filled with an unspeakable reverence

Through many years of bitter poverty, years which crept drearily along the verge of starvation, he had written his opera—written upon scraps of paper in garrets, and upon scraps of paper on the street, and upon scraps of paper while sheltering himself under the piers of the "Beggar's Bridge." The music had come to him amidst the storms of nature and the storms of his own soul, but the sweetness and calm of the ending had come to him beside the death-bed of a little child. He had found her in a worse plight than his own, had taken care of her, had worked for her, and had loved her with the yearning, hungry love of a man who has dammed up the currents of his own life for a long period only to see them rush forth in a torrent when the dam is torn away. For only one short month had he possessed this frail, sweet flower, but in that month his opera had found the frank sincerity of trusting childhood which rounded it into completeness.

Through the years he had torn up and revised and matched and harmonized, until he lived in a world of his own and felt like a stranger in the material world about him. His opera was his life, and as he saw it undergo rejection after rejection, the iron had entered his soul and he feared that in the end he would lose his reason and vent his fury upon the human race. Manager after manager had read it in a patronizing way, and had suggested that it had parts which were not bad, and that if he cared to instill a generous share of comedy into it they would be willing to reread and consider it. Kasting also had wanted at least a touch of comedy, but Du Val had turned and left him without a word. And this was the "play" which this vast audience

had gathered within the Opéra Comique to pass judgment upon.

Was there ever a comfortable first night? That grim, fickle, implacable judge which has often been flattered but cannot be bribed, that judge who has been cruel as often as indulgent, which chooses a favorite or a scapegoat with equal equanimity and without convincing argument. Who would not dread the trial of this first night before such a capricious judge as the vacillating public?

Behind the curtain there was not a single heart which beat with its accustomed regularity. The face of Bertrand was as calm and assured as though cut from granite, the face of Du Val was white as chalk, his eyes were fever-bright, while a peculiar twitching of eyelids and mouth told of the strain through which he was going, yet beneath the surface there was but little difference in the waves of doubt which surged within. Nachette felt so much like the small child who is made to speak his ill-timed verses against his better judgment that she fretted in a manner most unusual to her, and had it not been for the peaceful strength of Clarice she would have gone to pieces. But perhaps there were none who felt the ordeal as sharply as did Beppo and Luigi.

"Do you think it will be a success?" asked Luigi as they stood in barbaric splendor in the wings.

"It must be a success—a success means that our fortune is made. The one thing that worries me is the one thing that always worries me, and that is your wind-swept brain."

"Leave my brain alone. I have sworn a mighty vow, and this opera is to be a success if I am forced

to shatter my vocal organs; my voice is naturally strong and——"

"Your brain is naturally weak. Listen to me: if you drown the sweetness of my own voice by your hideous foghorn I shall put the curse of Mahomet upon you."

"Sweetness! The sweetness of your voice is like the creaking of a hinge, and if you think I am going to risk my reputation by having the people think that it is my voice which squeaks, you are greatly mistaken, curse or no curse."

The scenery was beautiful and the quaint costumes were graceful and picturesque. The opera moved along smoothly and was well received, although there was none of that bursting applause so dear to the managerial heart. "It lacks the touch of humor," said Kasting sadly. "They will not be happy until they get it, and there is no use clinging to useless ideals." Nachette was received with an ovation upon her first entrance, and the audience gave easy indulgence to her interpretation; but upon her second appearance there was only a small ripple of applause, and the entire cast felt the icy chill of what may be called a high-class failure.

And then at the close of the first act, when the people were gathered to hear the tale of the shepherd, Beppo and Luigi made their entrance. They were dressed as heroes in lion-skins and bore huge clubs. The odd contrast in their forms and the self-consciousness in their expressions, added to their grotesque struttings, gave promise of comedy, and the audience promptly gave a smile of expectancy. The two walked to the front of the stage as though to do murder and then drew back their heads to

sing. Alas! they had not yet passed through their first stage-fright. The nerves which had stood steadfast through so many trying scenes in real life utterly deserted them now; not a sound escaped the cavernous mouth of Luigi, while the voice of Beppo dwindled away to a feeble, hopeless squeal. A titter ran through the assembly, and as they noted the facial contortions which accompanied Luigi's struggle to gain control of the recreant muscles of his throat, the titter deepened into a laugh; and then Luigi found his voice. He also found his temper; he was angry at the audience for laughing, angry at Beppo for being able to make his failure less complete than his own, angry at the chorus, which were exchanging suggestive glances, but above all things else, angry at himself.

He caught his voice just at the point where Beppo was feebly imploring some unseen individual in the ceiling to fall on his knees. Raising his mighty club above his head, Luigi pointed his finger at the chorus and bellowed in the voice of near-by thunder, "Fall on your knees!" There was such an insistent and personal command in the mighty volume of Luigi's newly found voice that the chorus forgot its training and fell in a heap, much as though they had been paper dolls caught in the wind; and then Luigi forgot himself and his part and for a moment he was an ancient hero upon Mount Scenda. He finished his score amid the unnoticed billows of laughter which surged up from the audience, and as his last note died away he swung his papier-mache club about his head in an impressive gesture which caught Beppo across the shoulders and bore him into the footlights.

Never was burlesque so unexpected, never was

it so successful. The audience, cultured and discriminating though it was, fairly howled with laughter. Beppo, his dignity hanging in shreds about him, raised his light but bulky club over his own head and smote the head of his unconscious compatriot, who had forgotten all else but the entrance of the goddess and was bowing with profuse adoration in the direction from which she was to come. When the blow struck him he was leaning far over, and it supplied the needed impetus to send him sprawling on his knees. Hastily arising, he rushed upon Beppo, seized him by the belt and raised him above his head.

"You devilish, squealing, blood-thirsty insect!" he boomed in his mighty voice. "If yonder cliff were real, I should fling you over it."

"Set me down, set me down! You infernal beast!" shrieked Beppo, his voice thin and shrill and his arms and legs moving with hysterical rapidity like a green swimmer amidst a boiling undertow. "If you do not set me down—by the tomb of my father, I shall put the curse of Mahomet upon you."

Upon the irresponsible side of the footlights all was pandemonium—the unrestrained excess of hilarious merriment. The prompt and decisive actions of the central figures, following their original panic, had sent a tornado of laughter through the audience, sweeping all gravity before it. Those who retained logic enough to analyze could not determine the foundation upon which the incident rested. It seemed too artistic to be merely accidental, it seemed too inconsistent with the rest of the opera to be premeditated, and so these few awaited the outcome with much eagerness.

Back in the wings the clouds of despair were rent

by the sheet-lightning of bitter curses. When Nachette saw the plight of her retainers she wisely refused to make her entrance, but the fear of what was to follow had almost given her a nervous chill. Du Val had heard the interpolations of the two irresponsibles followed by the rising tide of mirth from the audience, and he had clutched his hair with his hands and had fallen back upon the small box up in the flies, from which point of solitary vantage he had chosen to watch the launching of his dreamship. The icy calm of Bertrand was broken, and he stamped his feet in impotent rage, while Kasting opened wide his heart and poured forth his woe in vigorous invective.

There seemed to be no exit. The orchestra was mechanically repeating the score which Beppo and Luigi should have sung, the prompter had lost both place and personality, and the audience was still laughing in unquestioning glee. Jack, who occupied a box at the left of the stage, was the only human being in a position to offer aid. He had attended most of the rehearsals, but had had none of the responsibility of perfecting a smoothly running machine, and so when teamwork was lost he was able to throw himself at once into expediency without ridding his mind of the flanges which held it to one groove. He caught excessive mirth in the laughter about him, but no ridicule, and like a flash it came to him that there was yet a chance to save the production. Luigi, with Beppo in his upraised arms, had staggered close to the box and Jack caught his eye. "Luigi ! Luigi !" he called. "Set Beppo down and sing in your most impressive voice, 'Behold, the goddess comes.' Just that and then wait."

Next Jack motioned to the nearest member of the orchestra; and as soon as the word was passed its monotonous droning ceased. Nachette had seen Jack speak to Luigi, although she could not hear the words, and something in his face gave her the stimulus necessary to overcome her nervousness. Setting Beppo down with a jerk, Luigi picked up his club, and holding it above the chorus, which had retained its kneeling posture, he lifted himself to his full height, filled his lungs to their tiniest crevice, and in a voice which seemed to rock the building, sang, "Be-e-e-ho-old the go-awe-awe-dess comes." He started at a low note and crept lower and lower until he reached the word "comes," and then his voice rose with a mighty sweep, full and resonant and majestic in its great strength. A hush fell upon the audience, and in that moment Nachette appeared. Her face was pale beneath the grease-paint and her eyes glowed with weird brilliancy, while her luxuriant wavy black hair, which had become loosened, seemed to wreathe her face in living coils. Her costume, which before had been of dazzling white, now was black, shot with innumerable dark green spangles which glittered like the markings of a serpent. Slowly she moved to the center of the stage, while the orchestra, gathering poise from her own assurance, softly began the prelude to her curse. For a space she gazed disdainfully at the kneeling peasants, and then, drawing her bow as though it were a wand, she pointed it at Beppo and Luigi, who in their turn fell upon the ground at her feet. For yet another impressive moment she stood over them in a threatening silence which the bitter expression upon her face made more intense; and then she began to play.

At first the music was soft and playful, telling of her love for the shepherd; but it gradually swept into a storm of passion. Her eyes closed, her head trembled with a peculiar motion which kept the hair circling about her face in living coils, and as the bitterness of her curse wove itself into her music the stage effects added their suggestive interpretation and made a scene gruesome in its realism. The mountain was rent by a volcano and the faces of goddess and peasants stood out ghastly and dreadful in the bronze light of the molten lava.

The curtain fell amidst a tense silence, which was immediately rent by a storm of applause. But during the moment of silence Beppo and Luigi had been seized by a squad of stage hands under the direction of Bertrand, and after a struggle carried away to a strong-room, thrust inside, and left in darkness to discuss their brief but picturesque career upon the stage of the Opéra Comique.

"Well," said Beppo as soon as he had recovered his breath, "at last you have been able to destroy the fruits of my labor."

"Destroy! You are as big a fool as this Bertrand. Is it a sign of failure when the audience screams with delight, and are you so deaf that you did not hear the burst of applause when the curtain fell?"

"They probably knew that you were to be thrown into this dungeon, and no doubt hoped that it would end in death. I knew that ill-shapen body and monstrous voice would destroy the beauty of the piece."

"If you did but know as much as you preach, you would be as great as your evening shadow makes you. Listen: when that young Jack be-

sought me to save the show, what happened? I merely opened my mouth and sang, and like oil upon waves, the audience was lulled into silence, so that when she came on all was ready to receive her. You are indeed a fool."

"I shall never again sing with you. You have a voice like the falling of a row of buildings, and your body is entirely hollow, like a bladder which stretches and stretches as long as one blows air into it. I had to take three breaths while you were bellowing at a single note."

"It requires much air to run a fine voice like mine. A mouthful of wind would run your penny whistle for a week; but to give full power to the voice of a real man requires——"

At this juncture their learned discussion was interrupted by the door being opened and a flood of light entering. Jack stood in the doorway, a broad smile on his face. Heartily shaking hands with each in turn, he complimented them upon their splendid efforts and said that the audience insisted that they come and make their bows.

As the applause continued after the fall of the curtain, Nachette had made her bow; various other members had also stepped forth; but still the audience insisted, and finally the call for M'ssieurs Beppo and Luigi arose, and Jack had come to fetch them. They were received with hearty applause and joyous laughter, and as they acted perfectly at home this time it was generally supposed that the dangerous experiment of leaping from the ridiculous to the sublime had been purposely tried and triumphantly achieved.

While the settings were being arranged for the second act Jack gave out word that not a breath of

what had really happened should be given to the public, but that all should be left to him, and then he had gone into consultation with the delighted Kasting.

The remainder of the opera was simply the unfolding of a triumph. The ice had been broken between stage and auditorium; each effort was received at its full value, and the blossoms of Art ever bloom at their best beneath the sunshine of true sympathy. At first Du Val could not believe that his opera, which had seemed irretrievably lost, could have recovered and was the success which his senses seemed to prove. He feared that the disappointment had destroyed his reason, and sat in his isolation, his mouth smiling the foolish smile of idiocy and his fingers picking at one another.

It was Nachette's great triumph. The purpose in her improvisations had seldom been simple enough to be fully appreciated by the majority of her audience; but in this opera, with the purpose strengthened and the effects acknowledged by the other actors, her own personality had full scope, and as she met and mastered each new element she fastened the bond between herself and her audience with ever increasing stability. At the close she was called several times before the curtain, and was finally forced to play upon her violin.

She looked at the sea of faces before her, while a strange light illumined her face. "I shall play you as I see you," she said at last. "You have been very kind to me, always, and now as I look in through your eyes I see nothing but kindness in your hearts. I hope that you have found something in this opera to take home with you. It is the life-work of a man who has had a hard struggle,

and yet the lesson which it has brought to me has been very sweet and precious."

Then she played to them one of her spontaneous improvisations which contained so much individuality, and after the applause had died away they insisted upon the appearance of the composer. Du Val was finally found and after much persuasion was convinced that his opera had scored a magnificent success. He stepped before the curtain and gazed about him as one brought from years of darkness into a blazing light. His face had never been so pale, although Bertrand had attempted to add a little color as soon as Du Val had agreed to speak. He stood before them, but there was no personal triumph in his expression. For years this moment had seemed to him to be one for which his very soul yearned, and yet as he stood there his face was sad and his slight figure and glistening white hair made him look very old, although there was a certain majesty in his carriage. It was as if he had at last recognized the fact that after all the judgment of these people was not able to give him the same amount of joy that his own convictions had. He had from afar off looked upon them as being superior to himself, but now as he looked down upon them he saw that they in turn were willing to look up to him as one who had climbed the heights and had found the treasure which all were seeking, and this change of view-point wrought a marvelous change in his own mental attitude.

"At last, at last!" he said musingly in a composed voice. "For years have I sought for an opportunity to have this opera presented, but was unsuccessful, and now that you have seen it you

wish also to see the author. I have lived a lonely life, and now I am as a trunk which is withered at the root. But barely enough strength have I found to put forth a single flower; but with all my heart I thank you for having treated this flower kindly. Good-night, my friends, and—farewell."

CHAPTER XXXII

NEXT morning Paris eagerly read the criticism of the new opera and found much amusement therein. The first-nighters were glad to think that they had been keen enough to foretell what promised to be a lasting success, and the remainder of the fashionable set resolved to go at the first opportunity and decide for themselves. After an elaborate eulogy upon the marvelous playing of Nachette, it was stated, among other important characteristics of M'sieur Du Val the composer, that he was a great lover of privacy, and having seen the launching of his successful opera would retire to his country home in the south of France, there to work on a new production. It was also stated that there would in the future be enlarged opportunities for the famous comedians, M'ssieurs Beppo and Luigi, who had just reached Paris from an extended foreign tour. There were also many other items, interesting and instructive if not absolutely accurate.

Du Val had decided to go to the south of France to finish his few remaining days at his boyhood home, and the parts for Beppo and Luigi were being extended to bring out touches of humor at more opportune points. Bertrand had endeavored to have both removed from the cast; Beppo and Luigi had each used every effort to have the other rele-

gated to positions of manual labor; but Kasting had seen the effect of their humor and was too shrewd to dispense with it. He also saw that if the two became aware of their part in the production, they might spoil all; and so every effort was made to keep the parts true to the personalities of the eccentric men who were to play them, and the result was remarkably successful. Jealousy was kept at fever heat between them, and save at the one point when they prepared for the entrance of Nachette, they were encouraged to make the interpolations, which were irresistibly droll from the very fact that they were so intensely in earnest. Du Val had consented to this, but had left the city without seeing to what extent the opera which had meant so much to him would be changed. Success had never before had so strange an effect as it had had upon this man who had given up years of happiness to achieve it.

The month of the Paris run had drawn to a close with the house still packed at each performance, and as the accounts had been flashed across the Atlantic and advertising upon the other side had not been idle, the New York season was already looked upon as an assured success; and at last the day of embarkation was at hand.

Jack and Nachette were sitting together in the small parlor. They were sitting very close together, while Clarice was busy about some household duty, for she had refused to return to a hotel and seemed to be never so happy as when managing the affairs of her small household. They sat for several moments in that contented reverie which is the acme of perfect comradeship, and then Jack reached over and took the hand which seemed to have been

waiting to nestle within his own. "What a year this has been, sweetheart," he said, looking at her with eyes fell of loving content.

"What a year—what a wonderful year!" responded Nachette, returning his look. "Just think, a year ago we were the merest children, and now—now you seem like such a very capable man, and —and I seem able to understand you."

"You able to understand me! Oh, Nachette, this is the only part of it which worries me! You stand so high in the eyes of the world, while I shall never be anything but—but then I should rather be your slave than to lose you."

She looked at him with a whimsical smile upon her face, tender and loving, yet playfully reticent. "I see some things so much plainer than you do—do you know that, dearie? Sometimes I wonder whether my duty should prompt me to tell you all I know, or to let you spend a long time in finding out for yourself."

"Oh, tell me! It's perfectly horrid of you to bury your ponderous secrets within your own heart —bury them in mine."

"Now you're forgetting what a grand person I am, and are beginning to act natural. I do not think I shall tell you. In fact, I am afraid that you will find out too soon as it is."

A wistful look crept into her deep, warm eyes, and Jack put his arm about her waist and drew her to him. "Why, sweetheart, I do believe that you are in earnest! You don't really hesitate in trusting me with everything, do you?"

With a little rippling laugh that was half a sob Nachette put her cheek upon his shoulder and half closed her eyes. For a moment she remained

silent, and then said in a low, coaxing tone: "Jack, I am so afraid that you have formed part of your opinion of me from the newspapers—now, don't laugh, I mean it. Why, sometimes when I read of the wonderful things I do I am almost convinced myself that I must be a great personage. No, I'm not. I know perfectly well already, and you will too some day, that I am merely a musical—freak; yes, freak, Jack Braxton; and intellectually I am nothing but a child."

"And a very nonsensical child at that. Why, you beloved little goose, do you suppose that I am desirous of entering the bonds of matrimony for the purpose of continuing my education? I hope with all my heart that you will always be a child. If there is one thing that utterly wearies me, it is a woman who insists upon discussing sociology and politics—religion is bad enough; but I simply couldn't stand the first two."

"And yet you seemed glad, or at least you smiled, when I gave that poor family so much attention this last month; isn't that sociology?"

"If I smiled then, you must excuse me if I laugh now. No, my dear, buying a resignedly poverty-stricken family expensive furniture and costly raiment and luxuriant viands will never convict you of sociology. Sociology would have made use of a brilliant array of words, each one of which contains more condensed thought than an average conversation; and would have first fastened the guilt upon some governmental or industrial outrage; then sociology would have preached to this down-trodden family until the family truly repented of having been caught in such a condition; after which sociology would have left a pamphlet and a bar of

soap and marched on to other noble deeds. If I remember correctly you started in by making the baby presentable so that you might kiss it——"

"Jack, it is the dearest little thing!"

"And then you got the furniture so that you could be seated without soiling your own gowns; and then you continued your reformation in order to have the balance of the family match the baby and the furniture."

"That horrid puppy I bought the baby tore a big piece out of the sofa; but then it is an awfully cute little fellow and will be lots of company for the baby when his mother has to go away."

"As a rule the more advanced sociologists do not include puppies in the necessities of the human soul. And as for politics, I doubt if you really and truly appreciate the fundamental points of difference between wicked Russia and your own beloved United States."

"Now, Jack Braxton, I shall never speak to you again if you don't stop saying such nasty things. Russia has a czar who can send any one he doesn't like to Siberia, while we——"

"Haven't any Siberia to send them to, and so we punish them by electing them to office and then talking mean about them until either they expire or their terms do. If the terms expire first we re-elect them, and then talk more meanly than ever; if they expire first we fill the papers with eulogies and erect beautiful monuments to them. But now don't talk politics any more, or you will scare me into believing that you have a tendency that way."

"But seriously, Jack, I have met other women lately—women of the world, who can say such clever things and seem to know all the little ins

and outs of life. Why, when I was away that time —doesn't it seem an age ago?—well, when I was away I actually could not think for myself, and now that I look back and see how foolish I was it makes me so ashamed I can hardly look you in the face. A child of ten could not have been more helpless."

It seemed absolutely necessary just here for Jack to kiss her more times than it would be polite to tell. "Well, but you are a child. Clarice has always guarded you so closely that that was the first time you ever had a chance to act for yourself, and I think that you did remarkably well. Of course most girls of your age would have known to whom to apply for assistance, but you were able to provide for yourself—and how many of them could have done that?"

"Oh, you are the greatest comfort! Jack, do you think that you will always love me—always? I know now that fame nor wealth nor oceans of applause can ever give me happiness. I must have all your love—every single bit of it. Do you think that you will always love me?"

"Yes," he answered solemnly, "I shall always love you."

"Jack, haven't you any ambition of your own?" she asked after a period of delicious silence. There was nothing of criticism in her question; just the frank, childlike candor which was one of her greatest charms.

"Every healthy man has an ambition. You will probably laugh when I tell you mine——"

"No, I won't, Jack."

"Well, you may, if you wish—I should hate to have an ambition which could be killed by laugh-

ter. I am ambitious to do something really worth while in sociology."

"Now, Jack, that is not kind; you are making fun of me."

"And are you never to be made fun of? A pleasant wife you will make if one has to treat you always as the great Nachette. But I am not making fun of you in this. I have an independent fortune, and I have been quietly studying sociology along what I am pleased to call its practical possibilities. You have supposed that whenever I was absent I was sitting in idleness at the club, but I assure you that I am known in some odd places in this town of many layers."

Nachette had taken her head from Jack's shoulder and was sitting very erect with her eyes fastened upon the carpet. "And yet you said that you would not want me to be a sociologist? How then can I ever be a true—helpmate to you?"

"Alas! I never thought of that," said Jack in a sad voice. "It is absolutely necessary for a man and his wife to be identical in everything. Yes, I shall have to give up my ambition. I shall become a carpenter and you can learn to file saws. Then when I come home at night you can file the saws while I am resting, and that will keep us in harmony."

"Jack Braxton, I hate you!" said Nachette, putting her arms about his neck and laughing with eyes as well as lips. "I see exactly what you mean, and yet I can tell you, smart as you think yourself, that if you were a carpenter I should mighty soon know the names of the different braces and joints and other things about a building —I just have to be part of everything that is part of you."

"And you will be. Why, do you know that some of my very best thoughts have come to me while you were playing? You are a sociologist right now. I don't believe that there is a single living creature in distress that does not find a friend in you, and if I ever do do anything it will be through your inspiration; but, dearie, when you make a business of it you have to follow up so many unpleasant by-paths that you lose some of the finest ideals—and I want to keep you always fresh and sweet and a bit old-fashioned, so that I can come to you as a storm-tossed ship comes to the sheltered harbor, and forget for a while the bitter, raging sea. You and I will just discuss the Utopian side and leave the origin and methods at the closed door of our own little castle."

"And you don't think that you will tire of me?"

"Neither of you, nor the sunshine, nor the flowers, nor the cooling breeze, nor of anything that does not make a business of helping humanity, but just helps it because the very thing it loves most to do is the very thing that helps humanity most. Oh, dearest, I have climbed up to where I can see a long way in many different directions, and I am no longer bitter even against tyrants, only sorry—sorry, but confident that even if a man were so debased that he endeavored to do the very worst he could for future generations, it would all turn out for the best. Some help by pushing and some by pulling; the evil example is as helpful as the good example, and the selfishness of piety as harmful as any other kind."

"Jack, I had no idea that you had all these big thoughts in your head. I don't altogether understand them, but they make me feel even smaller

than when we began, and yet someway a great deal happier. You are sure that you will always love me?"

"Nachette, why do you keep asking that foolish question? You have never seen anything in me to make you doubt it, have you?"

"Of course not, or I should not ask it. You do not suppose that if I had the tiniest doubt of your love I should have the courage to ask about it? This is what surprises me most in men—they seem so wise about many things and yet they are unable to see into the very simplest of them sometimes."

"That is why they marry—so they will have some one near who does not have to think things out, but can see into them at once, and then the slow-going man gets out his logic and reason and theorizes a plausible cause for the state of being which intuition had seen at a glance."

"I believe that we shall be happy," said Nachette, as though in answer to a question which had troubled them both for many years.

At this moment Bertrand was announced. He entered, debonair and immaculate as usual, but with a perturbed expression on his face. "I should like to have you insist that Beppo and Luigi be left behind altogether," he said abruptly.

"And why, pray?" asked Nachette.

"It had been arranged that the entire chorus should go second class, and now these mischief-makers refuse to go any way but first class. They are only part of the chorus—in fact, they are only in the production through charity."

"Yes, but they have their names on the bill and have had special write-ups, and at every performance get a generous amount of applause."

"But even at that, who are they to go first class? Why, when I first knew them——"

Bertrand paused, remembering when Nachette had first known him. Nothing was said for a moment, and then he resumed: "I suppose they will have to go first class; but they are becoming unbearable. We have to keep them jealous, and they make every one about them miserable. It may be comedy to the audience, but it is tragedy to the manager. If they only had a trifling amount of sense they would not be upon speaking terms, but as it is, they are not upon terms of silence. From morning until night they revile each other, and yet it is impossible to separate them. They even take long walks together so that they will not be interrupted in their quarrel. They will go mad and either kill each other or some one else. Well, everything is now arranged for the trip to-morrow. Au revoir."

"The trip to-morrow," mused Nachette aloud after Bertrand had left. "Jack, what does this trip mean to you?"

"It means that we are going home—home to be married."

"Yes, that is also what it means to me; and yet Clarice says that we must *never* marry. I told her the other night, just to tease her, that we intended to be married right soon, and oh, Jack, the awfulest look came into her eyes and she took me in her arms and said: 'Honey-bird, I love you better than my own soul, but I'd rather see you in your coffin than married to Jack Braxton.' Jack, what shall we do?"

"Love will find a way, dearest, love will find a way;" and as she rested in his arms everything seemed all right. He was so big and strong and confident.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AMID the usual bustle attendant upon the sailing of a big liner, two men of sharp contrast might have been seen engaged in a discussion which rendered them oblivious to everything about them. They were standing close to the edge of the wharf, and the gestures they used were both plentiful and strenuous.

"I hope and pray that if this concert is arranged you will be too sick to take part," said Beppo.

"They always arrange them; and if I were too weak to raise my own head to drink a cup of wine, yet would I take part if only to drown the shrill creaking of your voice and spare Nachette the dishonor."

"It would be as though one used ink to wash away a finger-print. Listen to me: now I took you when you were starving on the streets of Rome, and I have cared for you as though you were my own son, yet is my patience nearing its limit. It has been bad enough here in Europe where we are known, but now that we are going to a new country I want you to understand that if you do not mend your ways I shall turn you adrift to starve again."

"I was once acquainted with an old horse that turned a sweep. Around and around in a ring he marched the livelong day. One time a small snake

chanced in his circle and the horse struck him with his foot and killed him. Ever after that, each time he reached that spot his ears would stand forward and a look would come into his eyes as if he were about to do another heroic deed. You talk without ceasing, and yet it is but treading a circle, and each time you utter your one stale——"

"Silence! I have borne with your ingratitude, but that does not give you the right to hurl insults upon me. I shall——"

"I refuse to be silent," interrupted Luigi. "You have benefited as much by my labor as ever I did by yours, and I have a limit to my patience also. Now you listen to *me*——"

"I benefited by your labor!" shrieked Beppo. "I have suffered from that sheep's-head of yours. Here I studied and planned and worked until we had captured Nachette, and then this Bertrand creeps in and gets the glory——"

"Through no fault of mine, however, but only because you could not run the motor-car. I always said it was a waste of——"

"And then through your fool nonsense we have to parade about the earth as two comedians from South America. Does a man of my ability want to get upon the stage to be laughed at for your folly? There is a sweetness about mine own voice which would raise me to a great eminence if I only had the heart to turn you adrift."

"I have always heard that the last to learn that a man was insane was the man himself, and now I know it is true. Why, if it were not for my voice of marvelous power, you would once more be begging at the door of St. Peter's."

"You infernal liar! If you say again that I ever

begged, I shall put upon you the curse of Mahomet," cried Beppo.

"If you ever dare to put upon me the curse of Mahomet, I shall tear you into bits."

"I swear I shall if you do not mend your ways."

"And I swear that if you do I shall destroy you."

For a space they glared into each other's eyes, until Beppo said fiercely: "Then take it back about my begging."

"I shall not, for I saw you with a patch over your eye and a painted sore on your leg and——"

"You son of a fiend—I put the curse of Mahomet upon you."

As Beppo shouted the words Luigi made a lunge for him, and his hand struck Beppo solidly upon the chest; but before it could close and fasten its grip Beppo had fallen backward into the water. There was a choppy sea, and as Beppo fell he struck his head upon a bit of floating timber. Luigi looked into the water with a scowl on his face, but when he saw that his old comrade made no move to save himself, he threw off his coat and leaped after him. He had hard work to keep Beppo's limp head above the tide; but a score of helpers promptly threw him ropes, and soon both men were lifted to the wharf.

"Ah, Beppo, Beppo, child of my heart!" murmured Luigi plaintively as he rubbed the white forehead of his still friend. "Open your eyes—open your eyes and look at me! Ah, speak to me, speak to me with your soft, sweet voice!"

Without heeding the crowd about him, Luigi continued to pour out his love in endearing terms, until at last Beppo opened his eyes and gazed

into those which were bending over him. He reached up his hand and put it into Luigi's. "How did I get out, old friend?"

"I jumped in and fetched you out—and I should have done the same had it been the lake of fire and brimstone."

A wan smile lighted the face of the prostrate man, but as his sturdy strength returned his smile gave way to his customary taunting grin. "Well, I am sorry that I fell in, but if you catch such a cold that you can never again sing, I shall rejoice."

Beppo's head had been resting upon Luigi's knee, but at this sign of returning health Luigi gave his knee a jerk and Beppo's head fell to the wharf with a bang. "I jumped in but for one thing," he said angrily. "I want you to tell me what the curse of Mahomet means."

"I know not," answered Beppo, slowly getting to his feet, while the crowd, losing interest in a man who seemed likely to encumber the earth for many days longer, drew away from them. "But this I do know, that my great-aunt lay at the point of death with her will made in my favor, and by ill-luck I was forced to take a few small coins from an Arab. When I tripped him and rolled him into the bay, he put the curse of Mahomet upon me, and my great-aunt got well and changed her will and left me never a cent."

"And you had the heart to put such a vile curse as that upon me?" said Luigi, hot with anger. "Now, listen: if you do not take it back this instant, I shall hurl you into the sea again, and if you do not drown I shall jump in and hold your villainous head under water."

"Well," said Beppo, after deliberation, "it is not

wise to meddle with a heathen curse, since we be Christian men. I take it off you, but remember, I still hope your voice is gone forever."

As the *Campagne* was all ready to swing away from her dock, Kasting's roving eye caught sight of his two preoccupied comedians and had barely time to get them aboard, still grumbling and dripping, before the ship was under way, and Bertrand, who had congratulated himself upon having at last gotten rid of them, stamped upon the deck in helpless rage and then retired to his cabin.

The passage was uneventful, but to Jack and Nachette one of almost unalloyed bliss. It was cold, but they had prepared for it and nearly always managed to find a spot where their less rigorous companions were not at hand to disturb the sweet details of their simple plans. The attitude of Clarice worried Jack much more than he was willing to admit to Nachette. If Clarice herself had disliked him, Jack could have found some solution to his problem; but she was invariably kind, and not with the cold formality which etiquette requires, but with that close sympathy which is the badge of true affection the world around.

Still he did not allow morbid thoughts to interfere with the delights at hand. He was a good sailor and only suffered a little upon the first day out, while Nachette did not miss a single meal and was as happy and enthusiastic as a child; but they were not selfish in their happiness and entered fully into the general plan of mutual entertainment.

Beppo had escaped the pangs of sea-sickness, but poor Luigi had given up all hope of ever seeing land again. "Beppo, little Beppo," he would moan, "you will not let them throw me into the sea—give

me this much comfort at least. I have lived a Christian—let me die one and rest in holy ground. I do believe that you did not take all that heathen curse away from me. Try and call it out once more. Ah, this is terrible! I wish I had never become a great artist to go upon the treacherous sea, but had stayed at home in sunny Italy to earn an honest living as I was doing before ever I met you."

Beppo treated him with womanlike tenderness, seldom leaving his bedside, and that not for long. When they had first entered their stateroom they had wrangled bitterly as to which should have the upper berth. They were filled with the idea that this was the most desirable as it would be closer to the surface in case the boat should sink, and they had quarreled about it until the choppy waves of the Channel had bowled Luigi over into the lower berth, too weak to care whether or not he had a bed at all.

But at last the day they were to enter New York harbor arrived, and as the sea was calm and the day warm Luigi ventured to put his feet upon the floor, and holding his giddy head in his hands, said: "Beppo, I think after all I shall live to see the land again—and it will all be owing to the care you have taken of me. I shall never again speak harshly to you. Is there any way to get food at this hour?"

Beppo sent for some soup, and Luigi drank it without removing the bowl from his lips. "Yes, this will do," he said as he handed back the dish; "fetch me some of this—but not in such a child's saucer—fetch me in a full tureen."

After this start Luigi improved with wonderful rapidity, and the meal that he ate was one long to

be remembered by his waiters. "I have been cheated out of many meals," he said, smiling in appreciation of his own efforts, "yet will I eat one before I go which will cut down some of their robber profits.

"It is an odd thing," he continued, "but do you know that my strength is already beginning to return as though it had never left me? Let us go and get some wine and cigars. On my life, there was much power in that soup. I shall have some more after a bit."

The two friends walked about for a while, and soon Luigi's legs, which had been rather flimsy at first, began to grow steady, and his spirits rose with every moment. "I have heard that this New York was a town and also was an entire State as big as our own Italy. I know this last to be a lie, but what know you of this same New York?"

"When I see with what little knowledge a man can exist, it makes me wonder what is the good of any education at all. New York is both a State and a city—the city being the capital of the State, of course; and they are both in the United States, and New York is the capital of that also."

"I have always heard that the United States was free. What need has a free country for a capital at all?"

"They have to have a place to keep their president and a place to make laws, don't they?"

"Laws? What, then, makes it a free country if they still have laws?"

"Why, they have to have laws; but here each man votes for the kind of a law he wants."

"And how long after he votes for it does it become a law?"

"I don't know everything. I never lived here, but I have studied about it."

"Yes, but if each man could vote his own laws what is the use of having any at all?"

"Well, it takes a majority of the votes to decide which man's law shall be the one used."

"How can they tell? Supposing I voted that no man should work more than four hours a day, and you lived a long way from me and you voted that every man must work twelve hours a day; how, then, would still another man who knew neither of us know which of our laws had won? Maybe no one else would vote for your law, and no one else——"

"They have an assembly of men like we have who pass upon the laws."

"Then how is it different from our own country?"

"Why, we have a king, haven't we?"

"I have heard it often, but I never saw him. I know one thing, he has never bothered me any."

"Then over here they don't have to pay taxes to support the government."

"When did you last pay your taxes?"

"I never paid any, but some folks do; and here a man may go wherever he wishes at any time and stay as long as he pleases, and——"

"Did you ever have any trouble in doing the same at home?"

"I wish you had stayed sick in your berth until the ship had come and gone again. I did not drag you here by main force, nor do I insist upon your landing. If you will agree to stay upon the ship and go back home again, I shall pay your fare out of my own fortune."

"'Tis not my plan to make a journey like this for the purpose of starting back home again. Now that I am here I want to pass a few laws. I should like exceedingly well to dwell in a land which was ruled by laws of my own making; and as for your paying my fare from your own fortune, I have one of my own fully as ample as yours, when I choose to return."

"Yes, and a vile miser you are about it too. When you were lying at the point of death I tried to get your belt off, so that if it came to the worst your wealth would not be thrown with you to the fishes, and you struck me a blow which nearly killed me."

"It was never my custom to remove my clothes before I was ready to go to bed. When I am dead you or another may have what I leave, but as long as I am able to move about I shall spend my own money. Come, let us get something to eat and drink, we have not much longer on this ship."

As they neared the mouth of the harbor Nachette was beside herself with eagerness and asked Jack innumerable questions. It was a clear, bright day, and as they stood together on the hurricane deck, he was able to point out many objects of interest which her glass brought close to her. As they passed between the two hypocritical forts which guard the Narrows with their frowning, harmless walls of stone, and their smiling, deadly banks of grass, still green although a puff of snow lightly rested here and there, Nachette hooked her elbow in the hollow of Jack's arm and rested lightly against him while he explained the mystery of the disappearing guns.

"It is like life, isn't it, dear? The things which

frighten us the worst are apt to be the least harmful, while something else which comes to us with a smile upon its lips is apt to strike us to the heart."

Her voice was meant to be light, but there was a wistful little undertone of sadness in it. "There is a bit of very true philosophy in that," answered Jack, "but where did you learn it?"

"Where I learn most things—from my violin. Last night I was playing softly to myself, and the weary weeks when I was away from you all ran through my mind; but now as I look back at them they were not really so terrible as I then thought. And after that I—I just let the violin play the most beautiful thing in all my life, but—but I did not finish it. Oh, Jack, surely this home-coming of mine is not going to be a disappointment, is it? You don't think it will be, do you?"

"Why, no, of course it won't be. This season you will have the greatest success which an artist ever enjoyed, and then in the spring, when the birds are building their nests among the flowers, we too shall build our nest, and we shall line it with love and peace and happiness, and we shall guard it well, so that nothing that is within can escape, and nothing harmful can get in."

"I never seem to doubt when I am with you; but sometimes when I am alone I am so afraid that something will happen to separate us. Jack, I couldn't live without you. I was not sure at first, but now I know, and I love you, I love you, I love you!"

He pressed the little arm which trembled against his own, and their hearts were close together as they stood in happy silence while the great liner steamed majestically up the bay and into the noisy mist which hung about the city.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"THESE New York tailors are abominable," remarked Luigi, seeking to see his back in the mirror. Beppo sat near and idly gazed about their luxurious apartment, for they had just returned from the evening performance and were awaiting their supper. "This is the fourth suit I have had which does not altogether please me, and that is a bad record out of seven. I would I had your simple tastes."

"I would you would cultivate the habit of meditation. Your voice is like the roar of the sea. As for me, I am sick of this life."

"Yes, the life is not one which a gentleman would choose if he knew all its irritating drawbacks —yet there is a fair income in it. We are now making more than in our last business, and it is a pleasant thing to see one's name each morning in the paper—that is, as long as one is in this business."

"But their everlasting laughter drives me wild; and yet the more dignified I am, the less they can appreciate. These last two duets of ours are grand, and yet they laugh and laugh as though it were low comedy. I should like to turn a hose of boiling water among them. I tell you I shall cut loose from you and go away. It is you they laugh at, and yet the manager refuses to let me go on alone."

"Bertrand? Poor man, he cannot stand prosperity. He puts on such airs now that I can scarce believe I ever saw him in a cheap wine-room in Rome; but he is a great man—I saw it from the first."

"Airs! If any man put on more airs than yourself it would blow him away. From morning until night you are reading dictionaries and grammars, and books on fashion and etiquette, until one would think you the heir of a dukedom. It sickens me."

"My noble voice and manly form have attracted the eye of a rich widow, and as she took me for a count I had not the heart to spoil her romance. I may yet give up my professional career."

"I do not blame them for laughing at you—you are like a monkey; but I hate them for laughing when I am on the stage. If I cannot go on alone I shall throw it up and engage in something else. You have been my ill luck always."

"I have always been your friend, and even now, in spite of your ingratitude, I am ready to aid you. Let us each night select some man who laughs the heartiest, and when our part is done hurry around and take away his watch or his diamond. Then it would be our turn to laugh."

"No, we are out of practice; and besides, there are detectives there and we are well known now—we cannot afford to risk our reputation."

"You are right, there is easier money on the stage than in our old business. I have received an offer to go into vaudeville at a fabulous salary. I think next month, when Nachette's engagement ceases, I shall take the matter under consideration."

"This does not surprise me. I was prepared all along for this. I knew that as soon as another

crooked his finger at you, you would forget all that I had done for you and desert me. Very well; ingratitude is the world's fashion—I am prepared for this—I do——"

"The offer also included yourself, you goose. I should not desert you for much money. You have a vile, nagging temper, but your evil example serves to keep me from falling into your ways. This is why I shall never leave you. We can name our own price when this engagement is over. We have made a famous name. To be sure Nachette gets the greater glory, but we also get our share, and I myself heard her tell Kasting that but for us that first night in Paris would have been the last. What is personality? I hear much of it but cannot quite make it out."

"It is the many little ways a man has, which show what he has inside him."

"Ah, now I see! When that fat tenor throws his head to one side and sings I always know that he has onions and garlic inside of him; and when he looks straight into the eyes of the soprano I know that he has good wine inside of him. But why should this give one a larger salary?"

"Are you raving again?"

"I am not. I have taken a great interest in this salary question, and I find that two things are essential—name and personality. We have both—I have been told so by one who knew—yet I never before paid any heed to what was inside me. I shall remember that from now on."

"I wonder will Nachette play this same opera next year?" asked Beppo thoughtfully.

"This or another. She is called the greatest musician of the age. It is incredible, the money she

draws. And to think that once we had her in our power! Ah, well, she gave us our opportunity."

"She remembers those who have served her, I'll admit that. It was she who saw that our salaries were raised from time to time. If she wants me next year I shall give her the first chance."

"Yes, and I also; but I wish we could lose this Bertrand. What think you of rolling him off a bridge? They have some fine ones here."

"Your babbling folly seems to outlive every change. How is it I sometimes see you with men of intellect and they appear to respect you? What do you talk about when you are with them?"

"I do not talk much at all. When anything important is said I have a way of fixing my eyes, sticking out my lower lip, and nodding my head. No man can tell what a slow nod means, and yet every man thinks it holds a deep meaning—when it is wisely done."

"I have known you many years, yet I cannot tell whether you are a shrewd fool or only a lucky one."

"Sometimes I myself doubt if I be one at all. I have paid close heed to the sayings of these men of intellect I meet, and I have discovered that if they had no bodies they would find little to talk about. I have a body better than most, why then must I never speak what comes into my mind?"

The supper was now brought in by a neat Japanese servant, and as the two sat at table to partake of it, Luigi suddenly burst into a fit of laughter. "I could stand this with a better grace if I could but fathom some excuse for it," said Beppo, much irritated.

"I was laughing at what you said awhile ago," answered Luigi between gasps.

"I said many things, yet I knew not they were so irresistibly droll. It is enough to make a sober man mad to be everlastingly laughed at by fools. I am no comedian, and yet the papers all give me the credit, and here you are laughing like a donkey at something I have said. Now stop, or I shall hurl this salad-dressing at you."

"Laughter is not such a simple thing as most folks think," responded Luigi. "As much of a man goes into his laughter as into his tears. When it affects him not, a man will laugh about death or hell or even the honor of woman, yet are none of these light or joyous subjects. When I laughed it was not at what you said, but at what it suggested. You made mention of men of intellect. But yesterday there came to me a man of vast learning, the professor in a great college. He wanted to see what I had in my throat to give me such a grand voice, and after he had poked around and measured and fussed to his heart's content, we fell into an easy conversation, he doing the talking and me the listening. He was a small man, with ill-fitting clothes and a poorly tied scarf. He said that he lived upon raw food and but little of that, and then he went on to tell in five or six different languages just what effect raw wheat and nuts and cabbage and other animal food had upon his liver and his brains and all of his other vitals, until it was as much as I could do to keep from laughing in his face. In the end he looked at me and said that four fifths or nine tenths or some such a portion of my body was water. At first I thought he was joking, but he was in earnest, and when I got to the corner I met a doctor and asked him if he thought I was that way, and he said there was no doubt of

it. I shall drink no more water until I get back in hard shape again, and I'll not be too reckless in the matter of baths either. But I felt all right until I met this man."

Beppo had been eating in a preoccupied way during this rambling talk of his friend, and now he looked up and said: "Do you think Nachette will marry this Jack?"

"I have spent much of my time in watching the one they call Clarice. She has that in her face which reminds me of yonder picture of the Sphinx, which you made such a fuss over my buying even after I proved to you it was a work of art and fitted to gentlemen of our station. Each performance she comes to the theatre, and she never says much, but back of her eyes there is always a battle going on. She hides this when another watches, but no one ever tries to hide things from me. I have studied over it much, but I can't quite make it out. She likes Jack and yet she does not want him to marry Nachette. I don't think she wants to marry him herself—what other excuse, then, could there be? When a maid loves a man and he knows it, then it is a wise plan to have them marry. It may be that she fears that if she marries she will no more earn a fortune each week. This woman is wise and deep, and I would put the sea between us if I had done aught to arouse her. Jack is a nice boy, but there is little more to say."

"There is much more to say," said Beppo sturdily. "I have learned that he dared to nose that Russian Prince away from Nachette, and the Russian was a man of action. I wonder can there be anything between the Prince and Clarice? There is apt to be a bloody finish if so. This Jack is more

than you think. Lazernio tells me he has a great power over men. He speaks and works much among the poor. They think he is what is called a philanthropist, but I have no doubt he is a politician or something like that. I found three watches once in the pocket of a philanthropist, and since then I have always had suspicions of them."

"Nevertheless, I would lay a small wager on the side of Clarice when it comes to a struggle between them," said Luigi. "She is like the sea, sometimes she storms, and oftener she is calm, but all the time she is washing, washing, washing away whatever opposes her. Still, I like this Jack, and would strike a blow to help him. He it was who first saw that my voice had the power to save that first night in Paris, and that was the true beginning of our fortune. I am thinking some of buying a small store I know of. The rent is fair and the value is apt to grow."

"You treacherous beast! Would you find a bargain and buy it for your own self, after all I have done for you?" demanded Beppo.

"I have done so much for you already that a little more would not hurt, and moreover the price is a bit more than I wish to put into one voyage. Will you go with me day after to-morrow and see it?"

"Why not to-morrow?"

"A young maid was charmed by the music of my voice last night and sent me a note. I am to meet her to-morrow. There is something peculiar in her writing which leads me to believe that she will possess great attractions."

"I do not doubt it; never another kind of a woman has smiled upon you yet. If it were not for shaving off my mustache, I should put on a dress

and wave my hand at you, and in a flash you would fall in love with me. What of the rich widow?"

"She is on a journey. I am passing faithful, but still I have taken no vows."

"I swear that some day I shall fool you myself."

"Well, you have a voice like a woman, but a waist like a tub. I am neither blind nor deaf, and my sense of touch is also keen."

"No, but you are dumb or you would see that it is the rare sweetness of my voice which has made us famous."

"Did ever a great professor come and poke things into your throat and measure the roof of your mouth and say you were a marvel?"

"No, nor did one ever try to put me in a glass jar along with a toad or a spider or a snake; yet these are the curiosities which these men love."

"And do you still take me for a freak?"

"And for what else do you take yourself?"

"I am classed among the great artists," replied Luigi with dignified complacency.

"Then you were the one to draw up the classing, for never another man would put you there. I am going to bed."

"I wish your rest would give you better judgment. You are either lacking in judgment or justice—aye, slam the door; it is your best repartee. He is a jealous man—and yet, after all, I would miss him. It is hard to tell what I would not put up with before I left him to flounder along alone."

CHAPTER XXXV

"JACK, you seem so different lately. I do not see you half as often as when we first came here; and you are so preoccupied at times that I am beginning to believe that you do not love me as much as you used to."

It was a soft, warm afternoon, and Nachette and Jack were walking through one of the quiet paths of Central Park. The season had closed over a month before, but Nachette had insisted upon staying at the house where they had lived through the winter. It faced the Park and she had grown very fond of it.

"I love you just as much as ever, and I shall never love you any less, but—Nachette, how does Clarice speak of me when I am absent?"

"Why, I don't know—she never says anything mean about you. Some way she always seems to think that you are nothing but a boy and not to be taken seriously. I never noticed closely—but why do you ask?"

"And what does she seem to wish you to do the most?"

"Oh, she wants me to promise to stick to the stage until I am thirty, but——"

"You did not promise, did you?" interrupted Jack with stern voice.

"No, I always turn it off with a laugh, and say that I shall stick to my profession until I am married and that is all that anyone could expect."

Jack gave a sigh of relief, but there was a firm set to his clear-cut chin. "I understand now why she was willing to allow me to be with you so much—she had no doubt that she would be able to induce you to give your promise to remain upon the stage. She made me promise over three months ago that I would not marry you as long as you were engaged in professional work, or until she herself released me. I have kept away from you, dearest—the temptation is too great. Oh, you can't want me one-tenth part as much as I want you. It seems as though every fiber in my body ached for you at times. Why do you suppose that Clarice is so set against our marriage, and," he continued fiercely. "who is she, anyway, to have so much to say about you? I know that she has been true and faithful and all that, but still that does not give her a mortgage on your soul."

"Now, don't be cross, Jack. I never realized until the time I was away from her how very much she had done for me all her life. As I look back I can never see a time but that once when she was not near me. Whatever the picture is, she is always in the background, and yet it is her influence and her guidance which have made me what I am and have guarded me from danger. Jack, now that I am in a position to analyze and can in a measure understand what her devotion has meant, it almost frightens me—it seems so much like a religious service; as though she had set me apart for a certain purpose and had given up her own life in order to consummate that purpose; and yet I know —I know she loves me. Oh, Jack, I can't understand it!"

They walked on for a time without speaking

each thinking of the complex nature of Clarice, which maintained its passive yet powerful sway behind self-control, itself an uncompromising witness of the strength of her will. But the warmth of spring was in the air, and its peculiar intoxication entered their veins. After a time these two troubled young faces turned at the same moment and looked into each other's eyes, the clouds were broken and the sunshine beamed through. Ah, there is nothing more tender than the caressing touch of lovers' glances!

Nachette had changed much in the last year, as had also Jack, but the change was the more noticeable in her. Her low, broad brow with its wavy black hair crowned a face the oval contour of which was entrancing. The rich color of perfect health glowed in her olive cheeks, telling of familiarity with sun and wind, the red lips were moist and tempting, but it was in her eyes that the change was most apparent. Snatched from the deep shade of oversolicitous care, she had been thrust into the blinding glare of the world's fiercest fires; and the fires had tempered the rich ore of her genius.

During the past year, and more especially since coming to the United States, she had met many cultured people and had learned the little graces of society, so intangible and yet so effective. But above all, she had found her own nature and had recognized its effect upon the men whom she met. And so it was that the watchful assurance in her own eyes—deep and tender and passionate as they still were—had been bought at the price of childish trustfulness.

"Let's sit on this bench," said Jack. "I have just heaps to tell you."

"Do you know," said Nachette in shy confidence, "that I am talking to you all day long? I never see or hear a single thing which interests me but that I talk to you about it. Do you feel any of this?"

"Why, you little goose, I feel it all. You go with me wherever I go, and I never say or do anything without wondering if you will approve it, and sometimes I make long arguments trying to convert you to my way of thinking."

"But what makes you think that I should need converting? Don't I seem to enter fully into your life?"

He paused a moment, while a slight shadow flickered across his face. "Well, not entirely, but I am sure that it is better that you don't."

"Now I don't like you when you talk this way. I am sure that nothing else in the world interests me as much as what you are doing. Why, your name is never mentioned in the papers but what I read it over and over again. Sometimes I feel that I should like to give up the stage and go with you and devote my time to helping the poor."

He laughed. "And have you any plans?"

"Oh, I suppose not. There are so many poor people that it would not make much difference where one began. I think that giving a really poor person what he has been longing for is the way to get the greatest amount of pleasure out of spending money—don't you?"

"It is only in a very roundabout way that spending money for any kind of *pleasure* ever does much lasting good. Now I am not going to preach," he hurried to say as her face fell, "but what is commonly known as charity is largely a cultivation of

pauperism. Whenever one receives a gift he cannot hope to repay, it places him in a position which, until his self-respect has been washed entirely away, is extremely humiliating."

"Sometimes you are horrid. You make it appear that there is nothing left in the world but selfishness of one kind or another, and you have gotten me into the disquieting habit of tracing every action back to its motive, until I am convinced that I never give a beggar a penny except to insure myself against seeing his eyes when I wish to go to sleep."

"Did you read those books you finally induced me to give you?"

"I have been dreading that question. No, I did not; they were filled with horridly important words and theories which seem to me far-fetched and opposed to everything I have grown accustomed to. Jack, are you a socialist?"

His laugh this time was easy and hearty. "Unconsciously we are all socialists. There is no doubt but that I am one——"

"Oh, I wish you weren't! I don't like socialists or anarchists or any such people."

"If you had asked me if I were an animal I should have answered, 'Yes,' but that should not have suggested your saying that you disliked panthers and rattlesnakes and vultures. There are all grades of socialists—and if I ever get sufficient time I shall prove you to be a fairly good one—but it is unnecessary to get as rabid as some of them do. I am a firm believer in evolution, at least as applied to man's future, and I can see clearly that every line is not only leading to socialism, but through it to something much higher and better.

Why, our millionaires are contributing every effort to bring this condition about as rapidly as possible. It was not necessary for the original cell to see exactly what the fullest capacity of the last man would be; your finger does not know what your eyes see; and yet——"

"Jack, was this part of the heaps of things you had to tell me?" They both laughed, and then, recognizing the isolation of the bench they had chosen, Jack took her hand in his and said softly: "No, sweetheart, I wanted to tell you how much I want you to be with me all the time, and to make our plans more definite. How much longer are you going to force me to wait?"

"Oh, I don't want to force you to wait at all. If there is no other way—if you don't think we can win Clarice over, I am willing to give up my playing. I would give up anything in the world for you, Jack."

"But, dearest, I do not want you to make so great a sacrifice that it will sadden the rest of your life."

"It won't be sad with you."

"But there will surely be a way to win Clarice over. Our missions are too wide apart for them to conflict, as is sometimes the case when genius weds."

"I never feel like a genius when with you, I only feel like a young girl who wants to be cuddled—no, not here in the park, you foolish boy!"

"Have you no idea just what it is that Clarice has against me?"

"Well, she has always told me that she would rather I marry a foreigner, but under no circumstances would she approve my marriage to a Southerner."

"Humph! She has some notions which do not suit me at all. It seems strange that you are so ardent a patriot, with her opposition to face."

"Perhaps that is the reason. If I had lived always in this country I should doubtless have been as eager to go abroad as I was to come home And it is home, dearie. When we first went to France, Clarice tried to make me forget the few English words I remembered, but I clung to them so persistently that she finally fell into the habit of talking to me in English. We came from the South ourselves, but Clarice could speak French before we went to France. She will never talk to me about my parents, and I am sure there must be some terrible reason. Oh, Jack, I hate to know so little about myself. Wouldn't it be awful if I should discover some time that my father had committed some terrible crime? Do you think you would love me then?"

"I shall love you always—you must never doubt that or worry over it," answered Jack, his eyes moist as he thought of his own father, who had left, in addition to a large material fortune, the heritage of a spotless name.

"Clarice always talks bitterly about the Southern men, and I have sometimes thought that perhaps it was this prejudice which made her so hostile to our marriage. She says that the Southerner has—now you know that I do not believe it—but she says that he has no sense of honor and that he is cruel and fiendish. Now you mustn't be angry, because this has not influenced me at all, and I only tell you in order that you may know how strong this aversion of hers is."

"I am not angry, I am only sorry you did not

tell me before. She has probably formed her opinion from just one case. I can assure you, dearest, that you will find that the Southern gentleman is lacking in none of the finer traits of cultivated manhood."

There was just a trace of old-fashioned hauteur in Jack as he said this, but it sat well upon his broad, clean shoulders.

"He will have to be very fine to come up to my expectations," said Nachette, pressing the hand which was holding hers, "because I have formed my impressions of him from my own true prince."

"We shall have a confidential talk with Clarice as soon as we go home, and I shall tell her of my own father. He was one of the most perfect types which this country has ever produced. I know your own feeling for Clarice, and I do not wish to do a thing which would cause either of you pain, but, dearest, I am so anxious for the day to come when we shall be united forever."

They arose and walked slowly along through the splendor of the setting sun. All about them the birds were chattering busily about their household hopes and cares, the rich green of foliage and sward made up the bright garment in which Nature arrays herself to receive the wooing of her lover, and as the irresistible waves of love swept on about the globe, this boy and girl walked silently out of the beautiful park, feeling little electric thrills at every slightest touch, and marching in perfect step to the great mating symphony of spring.

At the door they paused and looked back. "I wish I were as sure of your hand, Nachette, as I am of my love."

"If you are sure enough of the latter, you may also be sure of the former. In fact," she added with a winning smile of coy confidence, "if you are not absolutely certain of the latter, I bid you beware, because I can see that you will soon be forced to take the former whether or not you are ready. Jack, I am so lonely without you!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

AFTER dinner they sat together in the cosy parlor. All the white lights were turned off and only the faint radiance from one rosy globe softened outline and shadow. Clarice sat near the window looking over at the park, while Jack and Nachette managed to keep afloat a light conversation, which did not prevent all from knowing that a crisis was imminent.

Finally, Jack drew a deep breath and said in tones of sincere respect, but which still showed the faint trace of condescension which was his unconscious recognition of the tiny stream of darker blood which wound through the veins of Clarice: "Will you kindly tell me, Clarice, just why it is that you are unwilling for me to marry Nachette?"

"You know—you both know that it would probably be the end of her professional career."

"No, there is a marked difference in our case. I have no artistic temperament to conflict with hers; we have enough outside interests to add freshness to our mutual interests, and—we love each other beyond the limits of selfishness."

"That has ever been the plea, but it has seldom proved successful. I shall never, never give my consent to the marriage."

"You must remember, Clarice, that while we are very anxious for your consent it is not necessary." Nachette spoke in a low, even voice, but it had a determined ring.

"And would you throw away all your years of work, all my self-denial to make those years possible, all your ambition, everything—everything, including your own happiness and peace of mind, simply to satisfy a—an infatuation which cannot last? Do you not know that I am the only one in a position to judge? I have watched you all your life and I know you, and I also know this boy and his type. He will tire of you—I say he will tire of you. You do not bring what he demands in a woman, and although he is swept away by—by passion now, it will not last. He will awake and he will tire of you and he will throw you over, and he——"

"Stop!" The voice of Clarice had risen to fierce excitement. She was purposely cruel to Nachette, who sat with pallid face staring at her. At the threat, but little veiled, in Jack's voice, she paused, and he continued in stern tones, while his eyes flashed ominously: "Stop! You have no right to judge me thus, and you have no right to wound her so. I——"

"You are sincere now, I grant you that, but you do not know yourself as well as I know you. I love Nachette better than anything in life—and yet I have judged her with honest, open eyes. I know the peculiar simplicity of her mind and I know that your own is complex. You have scarcely begun to develop; some day you will broaden intellectually and she will not be able to keep pace with you, and—and some day you will sink morally and she will not have the strength to hold you. You will break her heart, you will break her heart!"

"Then this is the real reason—your prejudice against my being a Southerner. I can make allowances for you, but still I cannot give up the happi-

ness of both our lives to satisfy your ill-grounded whims. Perhaps I can appreciate the feelings of the Southern gentleman toward the woman he makes his *wife* better than yourself." Clarice winced as from a blow, but without seeming to notice her, Jack continued in a voice very quiet and very reverent: "The memories of my own home come closer to my highest ideals than anything else which life has had to offer."

There was no reply. Clarice turned and looked across at the park, while Nachette sat with her gaze fastened upon Jack's face, a sudden tightness in her throat at this bitter contrast to her own doubts causing the tears to well up in her deep, dark eyes. After a moment Jack resumed:

"I have never spoken much of my father, because I wanted you to hear of him from other sources. I wanted you to go with me to Memphis and there hear whether or not the memory of a good man is so soon erased from the sands of time. My mother was not what would be called an intellectual woman to-day—there was always much of the girl about her, and her education and accomplishments were for the parlor and not for the forum; but my father was a man of many sides—a diamond, flashing the fire from a dozen lights at once. He was a musician, not only a trained performer, but a composer of high ability; he also wrote as a relaxation rather than as a profession, and yet some of his poems and philosophical essays are treasured by connoisseurs whose discriminating taste found those rare traces of genius which gladden the eye of the true critic.

"He was the soul of hospitality and entered into every social function with graceful enthusiasm.

"I said many things, yet I knew not they were so irresistibly droll. It is enough to make a sober man mad to be everlastingly laughed at by fools. I am no comedian, and yet the papers all give me the credit, and here you are laughing like a donkey at something I have said. Now stop, or I shall hurl this salad-dressing at you."

"Laughter is not such a simple thing as most folks think," responded Luigi. "As much of a man goes into his laughter as into his tears. When it affects him not, a man will laugh about death or hell or even the honor of woman, yet are none of these light or joyous subjects. When I laughed it was not at what you said, but at what it suggested. You made mention of men of intellect. But yesterday there came to me a man of vast learning, the professor in a great college. He wanted to see what I had in my throat to give me such a grand voice, and after he had poked around and measured and fussed to his heart's content, we fell into an easy conversation, he doing the talking and me the listening. He was a small man, with ill-fitting clothes and a poorly tied scarf. He said that he lived upon raw food and but little of that, and then he went on to tell in five or six different languages just what effect raw wheat and nuts and cabbage and other animal food had upon his liver and his brains and all of his other vitals, until it was as much as I could do to keep from laughing in his face. In the end he looked at me and said that four fifths or nine tenths or some such a portion of my body was water. At first I thought he was joking, but he was in earnest, and when I got to the corner I met a doctor and asked him if he thought I was that way, and he said there was no doubt of

it. I shall drink no more water until I get back in hard shape again, and I'll not be too reckless in the matter of baths either. But I felt all right until I met this man."

Beppo had been eating in a preoccupied way during this rambling talk of his friend, and now he looked up and said: "Do you think Nachette will marry this Jack?"

"I have spent much of my time in watching the one they call Clarice. She has that in her face which reminds me of yonder picture of the Sphinx, which you made such a fuss over my buying even after I proved to you it was a work of art and fitted to gentlemen of our station. Each performance she comes to the theatre, and she never says much, but back of her eyes there is always a battle going on. She hides this when another watches, but no one ever tries to hide things from me. I have studied over it much, but I can't quite make it out. She likes Jack and yet she does not want him to marry Nachette. I don't think she wants to marry him herself—what other excuse, then, could there be? When a maid loves a man and he knows it, then it is a wise plan to have them marry. It may be that she fears that if she marries she will no more earn a fortune each week. This woman is wise and deep, and I would put the sea between us if I had done aught to arouse her. Jack is a nice boy, but there is little more to say."

"There is much more to say," said Beppo sturdily. "I have learned that he dared to nose that Russian Prince away from Nachette, and the Russian was a man of action. I wonder can there be anything between the Prince and Clarice? There is apt to be a bloody finish if so. This Jack is more

than you think. Lazernio tells me he has a great power over men. He speaks and works much among the poor. They think he is what is called a philanthropist, but I have no doubt he is a politician or something like that. I found three watches once in the pocket of a philanthropist, and since then I have always had suspicions of them."

"Nevertheless, I would lay a small wager on the side of Clarice when it comes to a struggle between them," said Luigi. "She is like the sea, sometimes she storms, and oftener she is calm, but all the time she is washing, washing, washing away whatever opposes her. Still, I like this Jack, and would strike a blow to help him. He it was who first saw that my voice had the power to save that first night in Paris, and that was the true beginning of our fortune. I am thinking some of buying a small store I know of. The rent is fair and the value is apt to grow."

"You treacherous beast! Would you find a bargain and buy it for your own self, after all I have done for you?" demanded Beppo.

"I have done so much for you already that a little more would not hurt, and moreover the price is a bit more than I wish to put into one voyage. Will you go with me day after to-morrow and see it?"

"Why not to-morrow?"

"A young maid was charmed by the music of my voice last night and sent me a note. I am to meet her to-morrow. There is something peculiar in her writing which leads me to believe that she will possess great attractions."

"I do not doubt it; never another kind of a woman has smiled upon you yet. If it were not for shaving off my mustache, I should put on a dress

and wave my hand at you, and in a flash you would fall in love with me. What of the rich widow?"

"She is on a journey. I am passing faithful, but still I have taken no vows."

"I swear that some day I shall fool you myself."

"Well, you have a voice like a woman, but a waist like a tub. I am neither blind nor deaf, and my sense of touch is also keen."

"No, but you are dumb or you would see that it is the rare sweetness of my voice which has made us famous."

"Did ever a great professor come and poke things into your throat and measure the roof of your mouth and say you were a marvel?"

"No, nor did one ever try to put me in a glass jar along with a toad or a spider or a snake; yet these are the curiosities which these men love."

"And do you still take me for a freak?"

"And for what else do you take yourself?"

"I am classed among the great artists," replied Luigi with dignified complacency.

"Then you were the one to draw up the classing, for never another man would put you there. I am going to bed."

"I wish your rest would give you better judgment. You are either lacking in judgment or justice—aye, slam the door; it is your best repartee. He is a jealous man—and yet, after all, I would miss him. It is hard to tell what I would not put up with before I left him to flounder along alone."

CHAPTER XXXV

"JACK, you seem so different lately. I do not see you half as often as when we first came here; and you are so preoccupied at times that I am beginning to believe that you do not love me as much as you used to."

It was a soft, warm afternoon, and Nachette and Jack were walking through one of the quiet paths of Central Park. The season had closed over a month before, but Nachette had insisted upon staying at the house where they had lived through the winter. It faced the Park and she had grown very fond of it.

"I love you just as much as ever, and I shall never love you any less, but—Nachette, how does Clarice speak of me when I'am absent?"

"Why, I don't know—she never says anything mean about you. Some way she always seems to think that you are nothing but a boy and not to be taken seriously. I never noticed closely—but why do you ask?"

"And what does she seem to wish you to do the most?"

"Oh, she wants me to promise to stick to the stage until I am thirty, but——"

"You did not promise, did you?" interrupted Jack with stern voice.

"No, I always turn it off with a laugh, and say that I shall stick to my profession until I am married and that is all that anyone could expect."

Jack gave a sigh of relief, but there was a firm set to his clear-cut chin. "I understand now why she was willing to allow me to be with you so much—she had no doubt that she would be able to induce you to give your promise to remain upon the stage. She made me promise over three months ago that I would not marry you as long as you were engaged in professional work, or until she herself released me. I have kept away from you, dearest—the temptation is too great. Oh, you can't want me one-tenth part as much as I want you. It seems as though every fiber in my body ached for you at times. Why do you suppose that Clarice is so set against our marriage, and," he continued fiercely, "who is she, anyway, to have so much to say about you? I know that she has been true and faithful and all that, but still that does not give her a mortgage on your soul."

"Now, don't be cross, Jack. I never realized until the time I was away from her how very much she had done for me all her life. As I look back I can never see a time but that once when she was not near me. Whatever the picture is, she is always in the background, and yet it is her influence and her guidance which have made me what I am and have guarded me from danger. Jack, now that I am in a position to analyze and can in a measure understand what her devotion has meant, it almost frightens me—it seems so much like a religious service; as though she had set me apart for a certain purpose and had given up her own life in order to consummate that purpose; and yet I know—I know she loves me. Oh, Jack, I can't understand it!"

They walked on for a time without speaking

each thinking of the complex nature of Clarice, which maintained its passive yet powerful sway behind self-control, itself an uncompromising witness of the strength of her will. But the warmth of spring was in the air, and its peculiar intoxication entered their veins. After a time these two troubled young faces turned at the same moment and looked into each other's eyes, the clouds were broken and the sunshine beamed through. Ah, there is nothing more tender than the caressing touch of lovers' glances!

Nachette had changed much in the last year, as had also Jack, but the change was the more noticeable in her. Her low, broad brow with its wavy black hair crowned a face the oval contour of which was entrancing. The rich color of perfect health glowed in her olive cheeks, telling of familiarity with sun and wind, the red lips were moist and tempting, but it was in her eyes that the change was most apparent. Snatched from the deep shade of oversolicitous care, she had been thrust into the blinding glare of the world's fiercest fires; and the fires had tempered the rich ore of her genius.

During the past year, and more especially since coming to the United States, she had met many cultured people and had learned the little graces of society, so intangible and yet so effective. But above all, she had found her own nature and had recognized its effect upon the men whom she met. And so it was that the watchful assurance in her own eyes—deep and tender and passionate as they still were—had been bought at the price of childish trustfulness.

"Let's sit on this bench," said Jack. "I have just heaps to tell you."

"Do you know," said Nachette in shy confidence, "that I am talking to you all day long? I never see or hear a single thing which interests me but that I talk to you about it. Do you feel any of this?"

"Why, you little goose, I feel it all. You go with me wherever I go, and I never say or do anything without wondering if you will approve it, and sometimes I make long arguments trying to convert you to my way of thinking."

"But what makes you think that I should need converting? Don't I seem to enter fully into your life?"

He paused a moment, while a slight shadow flickered across his face. "Well, not entirely, but I am sure that it is better that you don't."

"Now I don't like you when you talk this way. I am sure that nothing else in the world interests me as much as what you are doing. Why, your name is never mentioned in the papers but what I read it over and over again. Sometimes I feel that I should like to give up the stage and go with you and devote my time to helping the poor."

He laughed. "And have you any plans?"

"Oh, I suppose not. There are so many poor people that it would not make much difference where one began. I think that giving a really poor person what he has been longing for is the way to get the greatest amount of pleasure out of spending money—don't you?"

"It is only in a very roundabout way that spending money for any kind of *pleasure* ever does much lasting good. Now I am not going to preach," he hurried to say as her face fell, "but what is commonly known as charity is largely a cultivation of

pauperism. Whenever one receives a gift he cannot hope to repay, it places him in a position which, until his self-respect has been washed entirely away, is extremely humiliating."

"Sometimes you are horrid. You make it appear that there is nothing left in the world but selfishness of one kind or another, and you have gotten me into the disquieting habit of tracing every action back to its motive, until I am convinced that I never give a beggar a penny except to insure myself against seeing his eyes when I wish to go to sleep."

"Did you read those books you finally induced me to give you?"

"I have been dreading that question. No, I did not; they were filled with horridly important words and theories which seem to me far-fetched and opposed to everything I have grown accustomed to. Jack, are you a socialist?"

His laugh this time was easy and hearty. "Unconsciously we are all socialists. There is no doubt but that I am one——"

"Oh, I wish you weren't! I don't like socialists or anarchists or any such people."

"If you had asked me if I were an animal I should have answered, 'Yes,' but that should not have suggested your saying that you disliked panthers and rattlesnakes and vultures. There are all grades of socialists—and if I ever get sufficient time I shall prove you to be a fairly good one—but it is unnecessary to get as rabid as some of them do. I am a firm believer in evolution, at least as applied to man's future, and I can see clearly that every line is not only leading to socialism, but through it to something much higher and better.

Why, our millionaires are contributing every effort to bring this condition about as rapidly as possible. It was not necessary for the original cell to see exactly what the fullest capacity of the last man would be; your finger does not know what your eyes see; and yet——"

"Jack, was this part of the heaps of things you had to tell me?" They both laughed, and then, recognizing the isolation of the bench they had chosen, Jack took her hand in his and said softly: "No, sweetheart, I wanted to tell you how much I want you to be with me all the time, and to make our plans more definite. How much longer are you going to force me to wait?"

"Oh, I don't want to force you to wait at all. If there is no other way—if you don't think we can win Clarice over, I am willing to give up my playing. I would give up anything in the world for you, Jack."

"But, dearest, I do not want you to make so great a sacrifice that it will sadden the rest of your life."

"It won't be sad with you."

"But there will surely be a way to win Clarice over. Our missions are too wide apart for them to conflict, as is sometimes the case when genius weds."

"I never feel like a genius when with you, I only feel like a young girl who wants to be cuddled —no, not here in the park, you foolish boy!"

"Have you no idea just what it is that Clarice has against me?"

"Well, she has always told me that she would rather I marry a foreigner, but under no circumstances would she approve my marriage to a Southerner."

"Humph! She has some notions which do not suit me at all. It seems strange that you are so ardent a patriot, with her opposition to face."

"Perhaps that is the reason. If I had lived always in this country I should doubtless have been as eager to go abroad as I was to come home And it is home, dearie. When we first went to France, Clarice tried to make me forget the few English words I remembered, but I clung to them so persistently that she finally fell into the habit of talking to me in English. We came from the South ourselves, but Clarice could speak French before we went to France. She will never talk to me about my parents, and I am sure there must be some terrible reason. Oh, Jack, I hate to know so little about myself. Wouldn't it be awful if I should discover some time that my father had committed some terrible crime? Do you think you would love me then?"

"I shall love you always—you must never doubt that or worry over it," answered Jack, his eyes moist as he thought of his own father, who had left, in addition to a large material fortune, the heritage of a spotless name.

"Clarice always talks bitterly about the Southern men, and I have sometimes thought that perhaps it was this prejudice which made her so hostile to our marriage. She says that the Southerner has—now you know that I do not believe it—but she says that he has no sense of honor and that he is cruel and fiendish. Now you mustn't be angry, because this has not influenced me at all, and I only tell you in order that you may know how strong this aversion of hers is."

"I am not angry, I am only sorry you did not

tell me before. She has probably formed her opinion from just one case. I can assure you, dearest, that you will find that the Southern gentleman is lacking in none of the finer traits of cultivated manhood."

There was just a trace of old-fashioned hauteur in Jack as he said this, but it sat well upon his broad, clean shoulders.

"He will have to be very fine to come up to my expectations," said Nachette, pressing the hand which was holding hers, "because I have formed my impressions of him from my own true prince."

"We shall have a confidential talk with Clarice as soon as we go home, and I shall tell her of my own father. He was one of the most perfect types which this country has ever produced. I know your own feeling for Clarice, and I do not wish to do a thing which would cause either of you pain, but, dearest, I am so anxious for the day to come when we shall be united forever."

They arose and walked slowly along through the splendor of the setting sun. All about them the birds were chattering busily about their household hopes and cares, the rich green of foliage and sward made up the bright garment in which Nature arrays herself to receive the wooing of her lover, and as the irresistible waves of love swept on about the globe, this boy and girl walked silently out of the beautiful park, feeling little electric thrills at every slightest touch, and marching in perfect step to the great mating symphony of spring.

At the door they paused and looked back. "I wish I were as sure of your hand, Nachette, as I am of my love."

"If you are sure enough of the latter, you may also be sure of the former. In fact," she added with a winning smile of coy confidence, "if you are not absolutely certain of the latter, I bid you beware, because I can see that you will soon be forced to take the former whether or not you are ready. Jack, I am so lonely without you!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

AFTER dinner they sat together in the cosy parlor. All the white lights were turned off and only the faint radiance from one rosy globe softened outline and shadow. Clarice sat near the window looking over at the park, while Jack and Nachette managed to keep afloat a light conversation, which did not prevent all from knowing that a crisis was imminent.

Finally, Jack drew a deep breath and said in tones of sincere respect, but which still showed the faint trace of condescension which was his unconscious recognition of the tiny stream of darker blood which wound through the veins of Clarice: "Will you kindly tell me, Clarice, just why it is that you are unwilling for me to marry Nachette?"

"You know—you both know that it would probably be the end of her professional career."

"No, there is a marked difference in our case. I have no artistic temperament to conflict with hers; we have enough outside interests to add freshness to our mutual interests, and—we love each other beyond the limits of selfishness."

"That has ever been the plea, but it has seldom proved successful. I shall never, never give my consent to the marriage."

"You must remember, Clarice, that while we are very anxious for your consent it is not necessary." Nachette spoke in a low, even voice, but it had a determined ring.

"And would you throw away all your years of work, all my self-denial to make those years possible, all your ambition, everything—everything, including your own happiness and peace of mind, simply to satisfy a—an infatuation which cannot last? Do you not know that I am the only one in a position to judge? I have watched you all your life and I know you, and I also know this boy and his type. He will tire of you—I say he will tire of you. You do not bring what he demands in a woman, and although he is swept away by—by passion now, it will not last. He will awake and he will tire of you and he will throw you over, and he——"

"Stop!" The voice of Clarice had risen to fierce excitement. She was purposely cruel to Nachette, who sat with pallid face staring at her. At the threat, but little veiled, in Jack's voice, she paused, and he continued in stern tones, while his eyes flashed ominously: "Stop! You have no right to judge me thus, and you have no right to wound her so. I——"

"You are sincere now, I grant you that, but you do not know yourself as well as I know you. I love Nachette better than anything in life—and yet I have judged her with honest, open eyes. I know the peculiar simplicity of her mind and I know that your own is complex. You have scarcely begun to develop; some day you will broaden intellectually and she will not be able to keep pace with you, and—and some day you will sink morally and she will not have the strength to hold you. You will break her heart, you will break her heart!"

"Then this is the real reason—your prejudice against my being a Southerner. I can make allowances for you, but still I cannot give up the happi-

ness of both our lives to satisfy your ill-grounded whims. Perhaps I can appreciate the feelings of the Southern gentleman toward the woman he makes his *wife* better than yourself." Clarice winced as from a blow, but without seeming to notice her, Jack continued in a voice very quiet and very reverent: "The memories of my own home come closer to my highest ideals than anything else which life has had to offer."

There was no reply. Clarice turned and looked across at the park, while Nachette sat with her gaze fastened upon Jack's face, a sudden tightness in her throat at this bitter contrast to her own doubts causing the tears to well up in her deep, dark eyes. After a moment Jack resumed:

"I have never spoken much of my father, because I wanted you to hear of him from other sources. I wanted you to go with me to Memphis and there hear whether or not the memory of a good man is so soon erased from the sands of time. My mother was not what would be called an intellectual woman to-day—there was always much of the girl about her, and her education and accomplishments were for the parlor and not for the forum; but my father was a man of many sides—a diamond, flashing the fire from a dozen lights at once. He was a musician, not only a trained performer, but a composer of high ability; he also wrote as a relaxation rather than as a profession, and yet some of his poems and philosophical essays are treasured by connoisseurs whose discriminating taste found those rare traces of genius which gladden the eye of the true critic.

"He was the soul of hospitality and entered into every social function with graceful enthusiasm.

He was nearly forty at his marriage, and my mother was just half that age, yet they were lovers always. I was only fourteen at his death, but I had long noticed and had taken pride in his tender watchfulness of my mother. I can look back now and understand much of what I then saw without understanding. He never took anything for granted with her, but wooed her constantly even to the end, and it kept both their hearts young. She lived only three years longer, and every minute of those three years she missed him and yearned for him and talked of him with me as though he were away upon a journey and that they would soon meet. I aged rapidly, and my mother's clinging nature did much to give me a man's mind in certain things, while at the same time it kept my heart young. She often used to tell me not to believe in the wickedness of the world; that she herself had believed in it until after her marriage, but from that on she no longer could believe in it, for she knew that if one man could be as good as my father, all men must be better than the world supposed them."

Jack had turned with his face to the corner. He felt a strange diffidence in thus throwing open the chamber of his holy of holies even for the inspection of the girl he loved. Nachette sat with her hand over her eyes and the tears silently rolling down her cheeks, but there was also a high pride in the set of the lips she tried to keep from trembling. Clarice had moved a dainty screen between herself and the light, and as she sat in its deep shadow her teeth were clenched and her hands trembled with the fight she was making. Jack's voice was low and steady, but very deep and tender.

"He was generous not only with his wealth, but with his kindliness; he was a Christian not alone in his duty toward God, but in his harder duty toward his neighbor; and yet—he had a secret vice. As long as I am telling you of him, I must tell you all. I had noticed periods when he would seem to be troubled, and when he had reached a certain stage of nervousness he would go away on a short journey, but when he came back he was always his own noble self again. I did not pay much attention to this and did not understand it until I read the letter which he left for me to read—after his death. He was killed in a steamboat accident.

"In the letter he told me that his life had been one long struggle against a drug, that he would not arouse my curiosity by even suggesting its name, but that at times it had made a demon of him, although he had kept his secret even from my mother and had gone away for a time when the craving grew beyond his strength. He begged me never to use a drug of any kind, and to be very careful of liquor and even tobacco. His letter was the most impressive which I have ever read, revealing as it did the terrible burden which he had borne so bravely. I have followed his advice: I have been temperate and almost abstinent, even when exposed to ridicule, and—not as the world says it, but as my father and my mother meant it—I have been a good man. In all the world there is no woman whose entrance into this room at this instant would cause me a moment's embarrassment. And this is the love which I have to offer. It is my first love and it shall be my last, and, well as I can see the future which Nachette has, I am not ashamed to offer it."

Again there was no response. For a long time the clock ticked on in unaccustomed clamor which brought out the whirring of its mechanism, and then Nachette arose and crossing to Jack kissed him on the forehead and whispered sadly: "Oh, my dearest, you need not be ashamed to offer your love to the greatest woman in the land; but I—I am not even sure that the name I bear is really my own. I can't marry you—I can't—I can't until I know who I am. You have a right to your pride, and I am also proud without the right. I dare not risk it, I dare not risk what might happen."

He strove to take her in his arms, but her eyes forbade him, and after kissing him upon the forehead once more she threw herself upon the couch and buried her face in the pillows, while dry sobs, which she vainly endeavored to overcome, shook her slender form. Jack sat with his elbow upon the arm of his chair, unseeing eyes upon the carpet and cheek resting against his closed hand, while memories of boyhood hovered close about him. A slight moan which seemed to come from behind the screen aroused him, and he glanced about the room, but as there was no sound save the tremulous breathing of Nachette, he resumed his former position.

Possibly an hour the three maintained their respective vigils, possibly it was but a few minutes—there is no measurement for such moments as these—and then Clarice slowly came from behind the screen. Her face was drawn and haggard, but her eyes were as hard and as sharp as a sword. "No, you can never marry," she said between teeth which seemed to bite into each word. "This craving which is in your blood, it has not reared its head yet, but it will, and it will feed

upon your brain and your heart and your soul. I know you, I know you better than any one else ever could know you unless it was your own father. I could see the signs in you long ago, and I shall fight with every weapon in my power to keep this poor child from also being thrown to the serpent which lurks in your blood. Now you have given me your promise never to marry her until I give my consent, and before you break your word to me look into my eyes and see if they show any signs of weakness. I have felt your scorn for a weaker race—I have felt it, I say, although you yourself knew not that you had it, with your talk of universal brotherhood. But I have felt it without wincing, and look now and see if there is a trace of weakness in my eyes. And look again before you break your promise."

He did look into her eyes, and felt a shudder pass over him. There was in them the glare which had once looked down the barrel of his rifle as he rounded a crag and faced a puma guarding her young. Like a flash that day in the Rockies came back to him, and like a flash also came a recognition of his many sides. There seemed to be a dozen personalities within his brain, and each brought some separate thought for his inspection. But his own eyes did not falter. "I shall keep that promise to the letter, and also any others which I may make, but I refuse to give up either my love or its fulfilment. You have no right to poison her mind against me, and I shall never cease to try to convince her of my love and you of your folly. Nachette," he said, going to her and stroking her hair, "you must never doubt me. I have no temptation to drink or to blind myself with drugs; you must not let——"

"No, but it is in your blood," interrupted Clarice, "and you may get the taste in medicine or the odor of it may arouse the demon within. Do not listen to him, dearie, do not listen even to your own heart, but listen to old Clarice, who has always loved you and who always will love you." She had fallen upon her knees beside the couch and had put her arms about the shoulders of the girl, who leaned against her, thirsting for comfort.

"Nachette, listen to me, look at me," urged Jack. "You know how much I love you—won't you trust me? What have I done that you should treat me so?"

Then Nachette sat upright, and looking into Jack's eyes, she said: "Dearest, you must not believe that any fear of you would hold me back. If I knew that you had a secret temptation, it would make me all the more ready to be with you, to help you when you needed me, but—but I can't bear to come to you until I know who I am. Clarice must either tell me, or I shall take steps to discover for myself. Now go, and do not try to see me until I send for you. Good-by, sweetheart, good-by."

He took her in his arms and kissed her, and then, as she drew away from him, he stepped quickly to the door, and there turned for one last glance. She had fallen into the arms of Clarice, who was rocking her to and fro and murmuring little, incoherent words of comfort. Neither looked up, and he shut the door, walked slowly down the stairs and into the street, while in his blood was gnawing a new desire—a wild yearning for something, he knew not what. He paused at the curb and shook himself. Was Clarice right? Was his life to be a long-drawn-out battle with debasing appetite?

CHAPTER XXXVII

ONE morning, perhaps two weeks after the evening when Jack and Clarice had at last come to a complete understanding, Nachette was standing at the open window which overlooked the park, deeply interested in watching a mother robin caring for her brood. Hearing Clarice, she said without turning her head: "A mother's love must be a wonderful thing. I have watched that young Mrs. Robin all through her courtship and the home-building and the arrival of the precious eggs, and now her strenuous efforts to feed her terribly ugly children. I can see how she might treasure those dainty eggs, but the birdlets themselves are hideous. I wonder if all mothers feel this same love—human mothers and all."

"Human mothers most of all." It was the voice of Clarice, but it was so deep and so solemn that Nachette scarcely recognized it.

"Did my mother love me this way?" she asked with wistful eyes still fixed upon the nest.

"Your mother was willing to give up her life for you, child. The bird-mother tears the down from her breast to make the nest soft for her little ones; the human mother is willing to tear out her heart by the roots if it make softer the path her child has to tread."

Nachette turned and looked into the burning

depths of the sad eyes she found fixed upon her. There was an anguish in them which aroused her quick sympathy. "You were never married, were you, Clarice?" she asked.

"No, I was never married," answered Clarice in a scarcely audible voice.

"That is probably the reason you do not wish me to marry," said Nachette kindly and yet with a trace of reproach in her voice. "I am sure that if you had ever been a wife—a mother, you would want me to be one also. I have been watching that nest until I seem to feel all the wonderful and mysterious joys of motherhood. Did not my mother love my father?"

"She loved him with all her heart. But you must not ask me about her, you had better just trust to me."

"You always say that; but the day is coming when I shall insist upon knowing the worst, let it be what it may. Did—did my father commit some crime which made his name a disgrace?"

"He was one of the most respected men in the country, but I promised not to tell you his name, and my promise was given to the dead."

"Well, was he cruel to my mother?"

"He always treated her with passionate devotion when he was with her."

"When he was with her? Then—then he was not true to her—is that what you mean?"

"Oh, child, I have been dreading the day when you would ask me to tell your woman's heart what I have been able to hide from your childhood. He broke your mother's heart, and that is why you were left to the care of a servant and reared in a strange land and under a strange name—and that

is also why I do not want you to marry Jack. I knew the nature of your mother and your own nature, and I know that he would break your heart even as the heart of your mother was broken. Don't ask me any more, honey, don't ever ask me again."

There were tears in the eyes of Clarice, and after a long, searching look Nachette said: "Well, I shall let the matter drop for a while, but some day I am going to know. I am going for a walk in the park now."

She walked across the street and slowly strolled through the park. So absent-minded was she that the sharp trumpeting of an auto-horn aroused her with a start to see Flossie's familiar car approaching and Jack himself seated in the tonneau.

Flossie pulled up with the usual frank smile lighting the ruddy tan of his boyish face. "Why, hello, if here is not the wonderful Nachette! Will not your honorable self enter into my abominably bum rattle-trap and amuse the deaf-and-dumb misanthropist who is disgracing the name of sociability? I have been as dandy a host as any man could wish. I have broken speed-ordinances and have taken all kinds of risks, but there he sits like the great god of silence with a toothache. Now, don't you put on a sober face. What is the good of all this glad sunshine if you humans are going to cloud it over? That's right, now, wake him up and make him laugh, even if you have to stick him with a hat-pin."

It had been a rather embarrassing moment for both Nachette and Jack, but she partially saved it by getting in and attempting to start a light and general conversation. She had not met him since

that evening, and was surprised to see the lines of care and worry in his face. She herself had been vainly trying to induce Clarice to give her at least a clue to her parentage, but Clarice had proved inexorable. In the pressure of her own distress Nachette had forgotten that Jack also must be suffering, and as the lines in his face told her of nights spent in endless questioning, her heart went out to him in a tender pity which had in it much of the maternal.

And Jack *had* been suffering. Now that at last he had discovered the real reason for Clarice's bitter refusal, he had examined himself closely and had discovered base desires lurking in his veins which he had hitherto never suspected. He appreciated the fact that he had developed slowly, owing largely to the careful life which his father's letter had impelled him to live, and now for the first time he feared himself. There had been a desperate unrest upon him since that last night, and he had had a constant subtle desire for some new, powerful stimulant which would take him out of himself and force him to forget. Over and over the question had come to him, "What was the drug my father took?" If he had known he would have purchased some, if only for the comfort of knowing that he had at hand something which would give him respite when the clamor of his thoughts became maddening.

He feared himself, and had almost come to the conclusion that he had no right to allow Nachette to marry him, even if she would. He had never before been in love, and consequently could not know the pangs of hopeless passion, or he would not have felt this fear, for this physical hunger of

his was the very common loneliness which comes to the disappointed lover, and nothing but the dangerous power of suggestion had caused it to assume the form of a baneful, inherited appetite. He suspected something of this when, looking out of the gloom of his introspection, he saw the sweet, sad face of Nachette light up in response to Flossie's salutation, and felt all the desires of his own body center and focus in his love for her.

But Flossie, who delighted in seeing all about him enjoying themselves in a frank, demonstrative way, did not gain much by the addition of Nachette. For a space she forced the conversation, and then she and Jack forgot the balance of the human race and fell into a low, heart-to-heart talk, which was not at all Flossie's idea of enjoyment.

"Oh, but I do trust you, Jack," she said in answer to his fear of himself, which he had expressed to her with all the importance it had held for him before he had seen her this very morning—before he had heard her voice and felt her soft, warm body against his own. He no longer doubted himself, but he wanted to be perfectly fair with her. "You have never felt any such desires, and if you never begin you never will feel them—and I know that you would never begin. Now don't talk or think of this any more. It never held a feather's weight with me. My doubt as to my own father has been my chief, my only worry."

"Why, you foolish child! Whoever he was, I love him for your sake. Now you mustn't bother about that another minute. The world would say that a nobody like myself had no right to look at, let alone marry, a great artist like you."

"Jack, I no longer care for fame—not the tiniest

bit in the world. Whenever you are ready to ask me I am willing to renounce my profession and become your wife; and if reverses should overtake us and we had to live in three rooms and I had to do my own work, I should never regret it, not for one moment."

They did not speak, that is, vocally, but they gazed into each other's eyes with a blissful rapture forming a rosy mist between them. And they remained in this ecstatic trance until the voice of Flossie aroused them.

"Now, I don't believe that you two have failed to hear me—it is all put on. I have asked you three times if you wanted to run out into the country for a meal of victuals, or to go somewhere in town for luncheon, or what the just desires of your impervious highnesses might be. What is the reason with you two, anyway?"

Jack and Nachette looked up somewhat sheepishly, and then all three laughed. "Well, if I had it that bad, I should certainly take the cure."

"What is the cure?" asked Jack, striving to appear as though he had no idea what the answer would be.

"Marriage. It is heroic treatment, but it is the only sure cure. Why on earth don't you get married? You are so hopelessly in love that you are becoming a burden to your friends. As long as two people can keep it to themselves I never advise them to do anything rash; but when they begin to mar the happiness of others, I say, 'Take the cure, and then grin and bear it the balance of your lives.' Now I have fagged for you in two continents, and I stand on my natural rights when I demand a reasonable answer. Speak."

"Well, we should like to get married, but——"

"That will do for yours, Jackie. And now what have you to say on the subject?"

"Well, of course"—Nachette paused, blushed prettily, and then continued—"we expect to be married some day, but——"

"And that is all the testimony needed from you. Now I shall point out your duty. In the first place, this town is so fatally slow I fear it will rust on its tracks. In the second, people who are in love never think of the enjoyment of others. In the third place, I am the one who, having no business of my own, is always trying to help my fellows who are weak enough to become involved in affairs of any nature. For the sake of the town, for your own sakes, and for my sake, get married."

"Getting married is not such a wonderful novelty," said Jack.

"Now don't try to impose on any one by assuming that you have no fear of marriage; it always has a dread sound to the masculine ear. The novelty lies in an amateur socialist marrying a great artist."

"Why, I don't see such a novelty in that," said Nachette quickly.

"That is right, make it as easy for him as you can. The girl in the case never has a tremor; it is always the poor man who tries to concoct some accident so that the ceremony may be performed in the quiet of a hospital ward. If the law would allow marriage by letter there would not be a bachelor upon the face of the whole earth. I have made this a deep study—don't question the authority. But I have a plan which will make all others look gray and commonplace. I have an idea for a

marriage—for your marriage, that is—which will flood the country with special editions. The joyous cry of 'Wuxtry!' will circle the globe, keeping time——"

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Jack, on whose face beamed the peculiar expression of a man who is appearing to resent being plagued about a subject which is most acceptable to him.

"Listen." Flossie brought the car to a complete stop, and turning about said in solemn tones: "Run away and get married—and *don't* go to 'The Little Church around the Corner.' Now, would that cause a sensation?"

"Oh, you make me tired!" chuckled Jack.

"I mean it. You are both determined to marry some time; it is always foolish to postpone the inevitable. I can't afford to waste much more time upon this one match—oh, there is no use picking up all the details; it is the proper thing—get married, and marry *now*."

Jack and Nachette looked into each other's eyes. A flush was upon their cheeks, and as they looked the smiles faded from their lips and instead a reverent promise appeared.

"Will you marry me, Nachette?"

"I am tired of my profession, I shall give it up," answered Nachette, remembering Jack's promise to Clarice. "Yes, I will marry you to-day—just as soon as it may be arranged."

"'Nuff said!" cried Flossie, whirling in his seat. "First we must phone the majordomo telling her that you will not be home for lunch, and then I'll take you to my sister's while we get the white gloves, ring, and other properties."

As Flossie whirled them up the street, Jack and

Nachette sat hand in hand. Neither spoke for some time, and then Jack said softly: "Dearest, do you realize what you are doing? Do you know that this means throwing away all that life has promised you and has so bountifully started to fulfil? Your playing is your life, and if you give it up what has earth to offer in exchange? All that I can offer is love—will that do? Oh, Nachette, we must be careful."

"All that life can really offer any woman is love," answered Nachette, her voice tender and vibrant, and her eyes moist. "It is not myself who plays the violin—it is the violin or its spirit or some force unknown that plays upon me. When I am giving forth the most beautiful music, I also am a listener or else I am lost completely. Sometimes I come to with a start and wonder at the applause of my audience. But oh, Jack, when your arms are about me, when I feel your heart beat against mine and see your eyes shining—then, then it is myself, my real self, and earth has no finer treasure to offer."

"But will this last? Will not the time come when your opportunities will sting you with bitter taunts at your desertion of them? Nachette, I do not want to be selfish—I love you so much that I would rather sacrifice myself than blight your happiness. You have marvelous gifts, Nachette; can you afford to trifle with them?"

He was not looking at her, and as she felt his hand trembling slightly and raised her eyes to his rigid profile, she realized that the battle between his love and his conscience was a stern one—and it gladdened her own heart to know it.

"Jack," she said, pressing his hand and leaning

forward so that her face was before his and he needs must look at her, "oh, Jack, is this all you know of a woman's heart? Do you think that when it comes to a choice between love of herself and admiration of a talent, a woman ever hesitates? Why, she only treasures her gifts in the hope that they may win and hold true love for her. A woman, or perhaps it is better to say a girl, holds many beautiful thoughts concerning virtue and duty and religion, she holds many ambitions, she treasures numberless tender sentiments, and she hopes to bring all these sacred keepsakes to beautify and enrich her love; but if it comes to a choice, she is forced to throw them away one by one and follow her heart. I love you, Jack, and that is all the answer I can make. When that is said there is nothing more to be said."

He did not answer her save by a steady pressure of the hand, and after a moment she asked: "Do you think that giving up my profession would also mean that I must never play again, or only that I must not play for money?"

"Why, it only means that you can no longer play for money."

"Oh, then it is all right, and I haven't a single regret. I do want to play for you sometimes, and I do want to play for the benefit to-night."

The warm sunshine was all about them, the wine of spring danced through their veins. Flossie was vigorously whistling the wedding-march from Lohengrin, and as they whirled up the asphalt to part for the last time there was a happy smile upon their lips, and yet the eyes of both were deep and thoughtful with the sacred responsibilities of the step they were about to take.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CLARICE was standing at the window looking down the street and wondering what kept Nachette. There was a strange foreboding at her heart, which she vainly tried to drive away. It was very unusual, although not unprecedented, for Nachette to accept a chance invitation to dine out. When Flossie's sister had telephoned she had not mentioned Jack, but still he was almost as much in the thoughts of Clarice as was Nachette herself.

It was nearly four when a motor-car, bright with white ribbons, turned from the side entrance of the park and brought up with a flourish in front of the house. Flossie was driving with his sister beside him, and in the tonneau were Jack and Nachette. As the car stopped the heart of the woman at the window above also seemed to stop. In a flash she saw what had happened, and as she sank into a chair a low moan escaped her and her head fell back against the cushion, while the comely face turned gray and ghastly.

Neither Flossie nor his sister would dismount, and after a scant farewell the happy couple bounded up the stairs like a pair of children. Now that it was done they had perfect confidence that Clarice would first scold and then forgive them, but when they opened the door and saw her crumpled up in

the chair by the window, they paused and the joyous faces were clouded over with fear and doubt. Instinctively Nachette put her hand in Jack's, and when his touch had given her courage she hastened forward and threw herself on her knees beside the strangely silent woman, burying her face against the breast which had never turned from her before.

Without turning her face or opening her eyes, Clarice put her hand upon the head of the girl, and as it rested there, heavy and tremulous, a long, sobbing sigh escaped her.

"Clarice, Clarice—we are married—we could wait no longer. I did not intend to—Jack did not intend to—it all came with a rush. I am never again going to play for money. Now won't you forgive us both? You must, Clarice—you are all the mother I have ever known—won't you say that you forgive us?"

The sweet, pleading voice of the girl died away like the echo of music, but still there was no reply from Clarice.

Nachette drew back and looked at the grim, new face above her, and then she raised a soft, round arm and circling the same neck which had felt her baby caress, she said: "Oh, Clarice, you will not make my whole life bitter! Forgive me—*won't* you forgive me?"

"Am I God, that I can stop the laws of justice? Am I God, that you ask me to forgive you?"

Nachette sprang to her feet, her face pale with terror at the dreadful calm in the voice of the woman. There was not the slightest trace of bitterness, nor reproach, nor anything personal. It was as though she had come in confidence to one who had never before failed her, and had found her

turned to stone—turned to stone and bearing upon her forehead a doom which could never be changed. She could not realize it, but she could feel the awful premonition of a judgment which no human power could stay. Even now Clarice did not look at her, and she turned and threw herself weeping into Jack's arms.

Jack had entered heartily into the first moments of the sorrow which he admitted it was natural for Clarice to feel, but as she had continued to cruelly ignore the pleading of his wife, the knowledge that she was his wife had come home to him and his sympathy gave way to anger. Gently easing her to the couch and tenderly kissing her forehead, he walked over to Clarice, and putting his clenched hands upon his hips, he glared down upon her. "Listen: we have humored you for months, we have done everything possible to gain your consent, we have treated you in every way as an equal at least if not as a superior, and now it is time that you begin to appreciate that something is due us from you."

A bitter smile crossed the face of the woman. "And so you have treated me as an equal! Well, if you had treated me as a superior and had obeyed me, it would have been well for you; or if you had really treated me as an equal and had kept your promise, it would have been well for you; as it is, the curse of your line and of her line has fallen upon us all."

"Are you mad?" Jack's voice was low, but it tingled with his rising anger. "Are you mad? You know how sensitive Nachette is—how dare you blight her wedding-day with such talk as this?"

"I am not mad—I am not even angry. This blow

is too heavy to leave aught of petty malice. If I am bitter against any one, it is against myself. I have known, I have known all the time, and from the first I should have driven you away; but in my vanity I thought I could manage without causing anguish to any. She was always so obedient, always so gentle and good, that I thought I could save her without causing her pain. After giving me your promise what right had you to force her to such a step? But it is like you—to keep the letter of a promise, but break the spirit."

"He did not force me. You have no right to talk to him so. He tried to make me see everything that I might regret later on, but I would rather have his love than anything else that life can give—and, Clarice, I am his wife now. Nothing that you can say or do can change that, so why do you act this way?"

"You are not his wife."

The words were spoken in a low voice; they were heavy with pity, but they fell upon the young girl like the crash of a tornado. Nachette put her hand to her white face, but sat up, firm and indignant. Jack staggered and leaned against the wall, his face like the face of one long dead.

"Not his wife!" exclaimed Nachette. "I am his wife, and I want the whole world to know it—and the whole world will, as soon as the evening papers come out. I am his wife."

"You are not his wife." There was no controversy in the woman's voice, simply the statement of an undeniable fact; and as conviction swept home to Jack, he seemed to feel his blood turn to ice at his heart and to fire in his brain.

"Why am I not his wife?" asked Nachette.

"Because the law of man and the law of God forbids the marriage of——"

"Silence!" Jack's voice broke in with stern insistence. "Whatever you are about to say you must say to me alone. I know that this child is innocent of all wrong, and she need not suffer. If there is a reason which makes our marriage void, I shall—I shall go out of her life forever; but there is no need for her to suffer unnecessarily for what she cannot help. You must tell me alone."

"You shall not tell him alone. For years I have been denied explanations which were due me. I am no longer a child—I will know what you mean, and I will know at once. Tell me what you mean."

Clarice stood in silence. Jack crossed to Nachette. "Dearest, let me first learn what she has to say, and then I can break it to you."

Clarice darted him a resentful look at his presumption in assuming the protection which had so long been hers, but Nachette shook her head. "No, I insist upon knowing now—now, I say. Clarice, I have always treated you kindly and have loved you with all my heart, but still you are a servant, and now I command you to speak."

As Nachette threw back her head and looked at the woman before her, the dull red crept up and spread over the face of Clarice. "I have always done the work of a servant uncomplainingly, but you are not entitled to the knowledge even of a servant. We are no longer slaves."

In moments of excitement the slight trace of the bondwoman was always less apparent; but as Clarice returned the hauteur of Nachette's gaze with one of equal pride, the inborn contempt which Jack held for the inferior race aroused his wrath.

"No, you are no longer slaves, but you still have the impertinence of undeserved freedom. It takes more than an edict to get slavery out of the blood."

"And it takes more than a white skin to put nobility there. The blood of my father was as good as the blood of yours, and the heart of my mother was as tender and trusting as was the heart of yours. Has your life been more of a sacrifice than mine? What is it that gives the indorsement to freedom?"

There was something in her words, but more in her expression, which held Jack silent, but Nachette was not to be put aside. "Clarice, you have been good and faithful, but I shall count it all as naught if at the end you refuse to tell me that which will bring peace to my heart. I command you to tell me."

"And I refuse to accept commands from you."

"Are you no longer my servant?"

"Servant! Slave! It was as neither of these that I cared for you in the hard days of your babyhood and worked for you while you were a child and have tried to do my duty ever since. Have I ever presumed? Have I not at all times been respectful to you, and taken your orders and kept myself in the background as would another servant, and yet, girl, do you know what it has meant for me all these years? Can you imagine the tenth part of it? Can you feel it at all when I tell you that I am—your mother?"

Nachette gave a cry and stood with half-raised hands and horror-stricken eyes. "My mother?" She turned and looked into the face of her husband. The shock of it was staring from his eyes, but in an instant he turned, and seeing the horror upon the

face of his wife, his own expression softened into tender pity, and he started to take her in his arms, but that instant had been too long. Like a blow his feeling toward the negro flashed upon her, and she turned away—turned away, and, without once thinking of the heart of this mother who had sacrificed her life in a useless endeavor to make her own less bitter, rushed toward her own room. Jack reached her side before she had made more than a few steps, and taking her in his arms, tried to comfort her.

Neither of them thought of Clarice. She stood with face hard as stone and looked at them. The life she had devoted to service counted for nothing. This daughter from whom she had asked nothing, this daughter for whom she had given all, now despised her with a loathing which impelled her to run and hide her head in shame. She had been willing to go to her grave unthanked if only her child might be happy, and now that her child knew the truth she had not even a kindly thought for all the hungry yearnings which she had locked within her heart. The dignity of sorrow was upon the face of Clarice, and the strength of despair was in her pose. All of the servant was gone from her, and naught but the woman, the mother remained.

"Dearest, it does not matter," said Jack. "Nothing matters but your happiness. You could not help it anyway, and no one need ever know. I love you just the same. Nothing can change my love. Don't cry, Nachette, everything is all right."

"No, it is not all right! I am not your wife—*she* says I am not your wife."

Jack whirled and faced Clarice. "Why is she not my wife?"

"Because you are children of the same father." The voice was low and sorrowful, but again there was no bitterness in it, although the woman had winced at the cold impersonal "she" when the warm, close "mother" for which she had hungered all these years might have been used. For a moment there was a ghastly silence in the room, and then Nachette fell fainting to the floor. Jack stooped, picked her up, and carried her into her own room, Clarice following. He did not question the truth. From his new view-point it seemed written in every past action of Clarice. He laid his limp burden tenderly upon the dainty white bed, and kissing her once on the forehead, he stumbled blindly from the room.

He tottered across the parlor and stood at the window idly gazing forth. He noticed numbly a boy rolling a hoop upon the opposite side of the street, and then he heard a slight commotion in the nest of the robin in which Nachette had been so interested. He looked and saw the lithe form of a lean cat amidst the maple leaves. In a moment the cat had fought off the mother-bird and had tossed one fledgling to the ground and was bearing the other off in her cruel jaws. Jack laughed harshly as a boy struck the cat with a stone. "It is an allegory," he said half aloud, in the quavering tones incident to certain forms of mental derangement. "I wonder if I am the cat."

As Clarice entered he turned with a fiendish grin upon his face. "Well," he said, not heeding the expression on her face, which was heavy with the haunting sorrow of a lost soul, "I suppose that you are perfectly satisfied with your management? I suppose you still think there is no one else to be

trusted? I suppose it gives you limitless joy to know that your vanity has wrecked the lives of two others; and one of them—one of them is——"

"Are there only *two* lives wrecked?" The question was grim and unshrinking. Then her voice softened as she paused to listen to a slight sound from the inner room. "Do you think it would have been an easy confession to make—not on account of my own shame, but in the knowledge of what it would mean to the poor little soul entrusted to me? Oh, you cannot understand! You with your boyishness and your crude strength and your faith in a noble ancestry—you cannot understand what it means to enter the world possessing all the intelligence and all the passions of humanity, and yet having no family traditions to make virtue a thing to die for. You cannot understand, and that is why I do not kill you with my own hands—that is why I do not even hate you."

Clarice stopped speaking, and Jack stood silently staring at her. There was a menace in the even voice more terrible than any outburst of passion could have been. She spoke of killing him as calmly as though it were merely a question of etiquette, and as he looked into the inflexible face before him —a face from which self had been crushed through the constant pressure of an iron will—he knew that from the first his life had been forfeit. He did not answer her, but continued to gaze into her eyes. There was that in them which steadied him. He knew what was before him, there was no question as to his next step, and the courage which glowed in the eyes of the woman would be a light to his feet.

"Do you think that you have loved her?" Clarice asked.

"I love her still. I—there is no doubt of my love. You will see how much I love her."

A complex expression crossed the face of the woman, heart-broken, piteous, and yet sadly satisfied. The quick tears welled up in her eyes. "There is no other emotion so selfish as young love, and yet love must always be measured by what it gives, never by what it asks." She put her hand upon his shoulder and gazed into his eyes with infinite sympathy. "The sacrifice which you will make seems hard and cruel, but what think you of mine? Each day a year—a year whose days seem like the endless doom of eternity. And yet I have had my own recompense. I did not ask for a burden suited to my strength, but I prayed and I worked to make my strength match my burden, and at least I have been lifted above the meaner things of life. I have studied everything which would help me to care for my child, I have kept ahead of her in her classical studies, and in addition I have studied the pathology of inherited tendencies in all its bearings. I knew her emotional nature, and more—I knew the nature which your father had left you. I knew that if I crossed you directly you would swoop down upon her like a hawk, having no more than a hawk's pity; but if you had both listened to me, it would have been natural for you to have lost your sexual love in the gentle affection of brother for sister. I meant to take you into my confidence at the right time—or else to kill you. Oh, I have not been careless or thoughtless—only I was not strong enough to prevent fate! The curse of our blood is still upon us—even now you could not be trusted—I can see in your eyes that you realize this yourself. Your pas-

sion, your inherited, degraded, perverted passion, has at last come home to you, and if you were to live you would be as your father was—a fiend—a devil!"

And he knew that she spoke the truth: he knew that he could not trust himself—that neither pity, nor fear, nor reverence, nor pride could safely hold his brute passions in check. He was absolutely honest with himself, and he knew that there was nothing fraternal in his feeling toward Nachette, even now. Slowly he bowed his head, but he made no verbal answer. Clarice took a small revolver from a drawer in the table and held it out to him. He took it mechanically.

"The night that you and Nachette were together in the park I waited for you with this in my hand. I am sorry that I let my heart soften."

He slipped the revolver into his pocket, and then he said to her fiercely: "Oh, if you had only done your duty—if you had only told me at that time, what a world of anguish you would have spared us all!"

"How could I trust you? It is ever man's way to throw the blame upon a woman, and I feared that even if you did give up Nachette, you would tell her why. I did not trust you—I knew your father. I cared nothing for you in the matter; it was only for her, and I still thought I could spare her." She paused for a second, and then she said with a trace of pride: "One can only do the duty which is apparent. There is not a drop of negro blood in my veins, and yet I have tried to make it appear that there was. I have broadened my nose, I have flattened my lips, I have kept my face stained so that I should seem to be of negro origin

and not possibly the mother of Nachette—and I am a woman, and once I was very beautiful."

"And you are not a negro?"

"There is not a drop of negro blood in my veins. My mother was Italian and French. I had no father—at least my mother was never married; but she told me that he was of the Southern aristocracy. I know the pangs of questioning eyes when one has no answer to give. I tried to spare my own child this. I tried to give her every opportunity so that she might stand on her own individuality, but the curse in our blood was too strong."

"Where did you meet my father?"

"In New Orleans. My mother was kind to me. We love but once, we women of my line, and when our love is turned to ashes we gather the ashes into an urn and guard them all our life. You do not greatly resemble your father, he was like fire—and like fire he consumed me. I can see him yet as he came up the walk, and my eyes told my surrender before ever he laid siege. My mother sold lace and she was not at home. She died without knowing that her care for me had been in vain."

She paused at the fierce light in his eyes. "It is not you who are to blame, it is my father—the man who was my highest ideal. It would not matter to me that you were her mother—not even if you were a negress. I love her—I love her!" The words came from between his teeth in almost a groan.

"Yes, it was his fault—it is nearly always the fault of the man. No man can ever *sympathize* with a fallen woman, because in the eyes of the world there is no such thing as a fallen man. When you spoke of your father the other night, what think you of my anguish? For I had known

this man in his tenderest moments—this man who came into my sheltered life like some wonderful being from another world, who won me with a smile and killed me with a kiss! Oh, I know how it is—I have read much of ancient mythology—it was always a god who wooed and won a virgin—and the myths are all true. I tell you"—she clenched her hands and continued defiantly—"they are all true. He comes into her life smiling and wonderful, and holding in his eyes the story of adventure and the courage which laughs at law and life, and also the promise of tenderness and warmth and love. And she forgets herself—she values herself only as she may give him pleasure. There is no longer a future for her, except in his smiles. I know how it is—O God, I know!" For an instant Clarice pressed her hands against her burning eyes, and Jack shuddered as he thought of the living sacrifice of this woman, so sensitive to sorrow, so capable of joy.

"And this man was your father—a god he was, and a devil. I have cursed him with a fire in my heart which dried my eyes and my lips, but in my dreams I love him still. I do—for I am a woman, and it is woman's lot to love the hand which lays her burden upon her. Oh, the bitterness of it all—the hellish bitterness! We have no desire to sin, we only yield to pleasure the man we love, and with our souls we pay for what we hated to do, and which he counts as nothing but one of life's minor incidents. Think of me—all a mother's love, and yet nothing but a servant—a slave to be sent from the room when I might most be needed. Oh, life—life! can eternity ever make it up to me?

"I saw him die—I saw him die!" Her voice was

low, but so tense that it seemed a shriek. "I was standing on the wharf waiting for him when the burning steamer came in. He stood on the upper deck and seemed to be singing. Another man stood beside him until the flames almost consumed them, and then they jumped together. I saw it—I see it now. He promised to make me perfectly happy on his return! This aroused my curiosity, and I had been counting the minutes until he came again. That was his return, that was the way he came back to me! The papers were full of his goodness, and he had a grand funeral, but I—I had to bury my sorrow within my own bosom. I could not even see his face again."

"Had he made no provision for you?"

"Oh, yes, I had an account of nearly ten thousand at the bank. Nachette was four, and I took her to Kentucky for a year, and then I went to France. I wanted to be as far as possible from anything which bound me to the past. I hated all men, I hated all good women, and yet I loved my child with a blind passion which made me numb to all else in the world. During all that year in Kentucky I brooded over suicide—I saw the desert ahead for myself and also for my little one, and I dared not risk life. Suicide is sometimes right"—she paused and held him with her eye.

Slowly he nodded his head. "Sometimes it is the only way," he said.

"Yes, sometimes it is the only way. But in the end I decided to offer up myself for my child—not by the easy sacrifice of death, but by the harder one of life. And that is what my life has been—simply to make of myself a living rampart for my child; and you have ruined everything—you have

ruined everything! Now you know all—and I think you know why I have told you."

Jack did not reply, he was looking off across the park. A trolley rattled by; down on the street children at play sent up a merry medley, and the soft warmth of the dying day came in through the window.

"Yes, I know why you have told me," he said at last, and he tried to smile as he said it; "it was to give me some of your own wonderful strength and courage, and"—he turned and took her hand—"it has not been in vain. I have threatened her entire future, but you know better than I could tell you how far this was from my intention. At least I shall never enter her life again—she is young, perhaps she will forget me."

"At least she will forgive you, there is no doubt of that; but oh, will she ever smile again—will she ever smile again?"

"And, Clarice, I want to tell you that I respect you more than any human being I have ever met, and from the bottom of my heart I pity you."

"Do not pity me. I am so much to blame that I do not deserve even so poor a thing as pity. It is natural for the ordinary mother to confuse ignorance with innocence, and think that purity will be its own guardian, but in my heart I knew better, and I was a coward not to prepare her. I still remember, as though it were yesterday, that moment long ago when my own first passion swept in, powerful and strange, and mastering me as a wolf tears down a bleating lamb." She paused, and then said in wistful self-defense: "And yet I feared to tell her. The roads of genius and insanity are always parallel, and I alone knew how close they

were in her—how dangerously close. She is a creature of light and sunshine—I know not how she will stand this blow."

"May I kiss her farewell?"

A strange new beauty came into the woman's face. At last she had been vindicated. At last her position had been recognized and she had been spoken to as the mother of her child. The tender tears came to her eyes, and the look which she gave Jack was one which might have come from the mother of the One upon the cross. But in it there was no trace of surrender.

"You had better not," was all she said.

"Good-by; if she asks for me, tell her I have gone to a distant land—tell her that I shall never come back, but that I shall always love her—like a brother." He looked her full in the face, and his eyes were clear and bright and his head was carried high. Then he caught her hand, pressed it, and hurried from the room.

As he reached the sidewalk it seemed as though he were returning from a long journey. Everything appeared strange, and he glanced about him curiously. He could not seem to realize the shock which had numbed him, and as he walked toward the subway one hand was in his pocket where rested the revolver. His brain was stimulated to wonderful activity, and the scenes of his past year flew by him, mingled with boyhood memories and the details of Clarice's story.

He got out at South Ferry and sat for a time on a bench overlooking the darkening water, still busy with its bustling craft. Then he turned his gaze up-town where the lights in the sky-scrapers were gleaming. "Ah, man, man," he murmured,

" you build for to-day, and you plan for to-morrow, but still you leave untouched the priceless treasures which lie about your feet."

He thought of his own life-work; he had wanted to do his part in helping his less observing fellows to a better sense of proportion in the measurement of life's values, and it was with a sigh that he thought of the little that he had accomplished.

" She was to play for charity to-night—I pray God she may be able to play, to play at her best and to forget me. And I pray further that she may always be happy—but oh, life is a hard thing to bear!"

Some children gathered about him, and he talked to them gently and gave them money. They looked into his eyes and became very quiet and not quite at ease, for the child can read the lines in the face, and much of his knowledge is gained without the help of words. They soon left him.

" I am glad that I made my will in her favor—it may be that she will not wish to play in public again," he murmured.

A blind man with a violin under his arm came up to him, walking with sure steps and mumbling to himself. He took a seat beside Jack, still mumbling. He had a rather fine face, but it was exceedingly sad, and his clothing was thin and old but neat and clean.

" Have you done well to-day ? " asked Jack.

" I never do well," replied the man shortly.

" Do you need money ? "

" Humph !—do I need money ? Am I not still alive, do I not hunger and thirst and feel the cold ? Do you think a man begs for pure love of it ? "

The man's voice, although surly and hoarse, was still of a tone not common to beggars.

"When the shadow first touches me, I shall end it."

(Page 428)

"I have not much money with me, but here is five dollars. I wish I could do more for you."

"Are you making sport of me?" asked the man with a slight tremble in his voice.

"No, this is a five-dollar bill."

The man took it almost with a jerk and thrust it into his pocket. "Have you ever seen me before?" he asked abruptly.

"No," answered Jack after scrutinizing his face.

"Strange!" replied the man, as though he doubted the statement. "I have heard your voice before." He sat silent a moment and then resumed: "But then I hear so many things in my dreams that I can scarcely tell the real from the visions. I wish I had been born blind!"

"Why do you say that?" asked Jack, becoming interested in spite of his own position.

"In the dreams of those born blind they hear and smell and taste, but they never see. Always in *my* dreams I see, and the things which I see almost drive me mad. I wonder if the mad really suffer?"

"I do not know. Could you play the violin before you became blind?"

"I could not play it afterward." The man held out his left hand, and there were but two fingers upon it. "I can still think music—music which no violinist could play with a perfect hand—but I can only saw out the simplest tunes myself."

"There is one violinist who could play anything which you could think," said Jack, half in reverie.

"Who is it?"

"It is Nachette."

"I have heard of her—I could never afford to hear her."

"Go to-night. She is to play at the benefit for—

for blind children. I wish that you would go. She is in trouble. Here, take my ring, say that you saw me just before I was to start upon a long journey and that I asked her to try to play your music. I want you to do this—will you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It is bad enough to beg at the best, but to keep on begging the same person until they detest the sight of you is more than I could stand."

"Do you never wish to do some one a good turn?"

"Not often."

"I think that you do. I think that your bitterness comes chiefly from the fact that you are powerless to help another. I am not asking you to go for your own sake, but for hers. It will take her mind off her sorrow. Will you go?"

For a long time the man sat in silence. "It seems absurd for a creature so useless as I to have any pride, but I can't do it. I can't go."

"Not even to lighten the burden of another?"

"Yes, but I can't believe it. I think you are just sorry for me, and——"

"No, on my honor, it is for the sake of the girl. Will you go?"

"Yes, I'll go. Where is she going to play?"

"At Carnegie Hall. You know where it is?"

"Yes. Yes, I'll go. Good-by."

The man shook hands and hurried off toward the subway. He did not go far, but turned and came back to Jack with unfaltering steps. "Are you sure you have to take that journey, boy?"

"I am sure."

"Well, I hope you find it peaceful—where you're

going. I suppose you don't want me to say anything about that to her, do you?"

"You don't know anything about it."

"Maybe not, but I think I started there myself once. Good luck."

The blind man left him again and Jack saw him enter the subway. Then he arose and went to a small clothing-store, where he purchased an entire change of clothing. He went to a cheap hotel and registered as "Willard Hampton, Melbourne, Australia," changed his clothes, wrote a letter to "Henry J. Hampton, Melbourne," and signed "Willard Hampton" at the end. The letter appeared to be from son to father, giving his reasons for suicide. He put this letter in his pocket, let himself out the side door of the hotel without being seen, and taking his clothing to a lonely wharf on the East side, he weighted it with a couple of bricks and threw the bundle into the water. He wished to spare Nachette as much as possible.

It was bright moonlight and the bay was like a picture. He wandered back to his old seat in Battery Park, and watched the panorama for a time in silence. His face was not troubled; there was not the slightest trace of indecision there, and his hand rested upon the revolver with a contented touch. He could see but one way to prove his love, and he accepted it gratefully.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and the moon was getting lower and lower. He picked out a certain shadow and watched it a moment. It did not seem to move, and he fixed his eyes on a small object an inch in advance of the line of darkness. Again he glanced across at Governor's Island, and when he

looked at the small object once more it was in the shadow.

"When the shadow first touches me I shall end it," he said as he caressed the revolver. Minute after minute he sat there in the peaceful moonlight, while closer and closer crept the shadow. If he had had the slightest doubt or hope the suspense would have maddened him; but as it was he became fascinated by the slow creeping, crawling, gliding of the stealthy shadow, and as it came nearer to him it seemed to become a thing of life, an executioner garbed in black and ready to take the responsibility of carrying out the sentence which he had passed on himself.

It was still noisy, but the sounds no longer attracted his attention. He was lost to all except the steady approach of the grim shadow. The boats, some bright with light and some black with shadow, still danced across the bay; an occasional careless laugh came to him as from a great distance, but he heeded them not. He had hypnotized himself, and Jack Braxton, who but a few short hours before seemed to have so bright a future before him, was now slave to a single idea. When the ominous shadow touched his foot, which he had no right to move, he must raise the revolver, press it against his temple, and fire.

So complete was this self-hypnotism that it would have been hard to tell which possessed the more feeling in the matter—himself or the shadow which was creeping toward him.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE large hall was filled to overflowing. The cause was a generous one, this no doubt brought some; the evening was cool, this also added its quota; but the great magnet which drew with irresistible force was the playing of the famous and still mysterious Nachette, and lest any should forget, the evening papers had been brave with headlines, pictures, and florid accounts of her romantic marriage to Jack Braxton.

Many great ones in the musical world had altered their plans in order to contribute their share to the benefit of the little blind folk—your artist is often selfish, but seldom stingy—and never had they sung or played with more feeling than on this evening. Nachette's place was near the center of a rather long program, but when the master of ceremonies announced that she would not appear until near the close, the audience smiled a knowing smile, and some one started the cry: "Congratulations to Nachette!" It was immediately taken up, and swelled to a hearty volume of good-will.

In her dressing-room Nachette sat in the silent despair of a dumb thing which has been hurt to its death without knowing cause or reason. She was dressed all in white, without a single jewel or a piece of color to give light and warmth. Her face was calm, except that about the eyes the lines of

anguish had gathered, and the eyes themselves seemed looking at something afar off. Clarice hovered about her with caresses, but she did not speak often.

"Honey," she said as the time drew near, "don't try to play to-night. It will be too hard for you. Don't try it."

"We talked all that over at home, Clarice. I shall not break down, I do not intend to mourn. To-night I am playing for the blind children, and all the balance of my life I shall play for the afflicted. My life is to be a busy one. I realize the sacrifice which you have made for me, and the sacrifice which he has made for me, and I shall make my own sacrifice. Now I wish to think; do not disturb me."

Clarice walked to a corner of the room and sank into a chair. "If she would only give up—if she would only cry," she said over and over to herself. "If she keeps on like this she will go mad. Oh, I wish she would not try to play to-night!"

Out in the auditorium the vast crowd was being well repaid; there were no moments which dragged, and each number was an added pearl to a strand already radiant; but when at last Nachette appeared upon the stage they burst into applause, waved their handkerchiefs, and greeted her with friendly congratulations. An audience is not, strictly speaking, an immaculate model of justice. It pays to be amused, but it retains unto itself the right to sit in icy disdain on the one hand, or on the other to reach across the footlights in almost personal friendliness; and the actual work of the performer is not always able to counteract the prejudice either pro or con. If life upon the stage is to be bearable, its

votary must learn to dwell in a premature eternity. He has no past, for it is forgotten; he has no future, for it is subject to a thousand petty whims; he has nothing but the fleeting present, and each night must learn to meet a death which bears no assurance of a resurrection.

In the tumult of its own joy, in the generous cordiality of its congratulations, the audience did not examine Nachette with discriminating analysis. She stood calmly before them, a pretty, simple girl, graceful and perfectly at ease. As she stood thus beside her music-stand with her violin pressed lightly against her side, many there were who envied her. The doors of fame and of wealth had sprung open at her slightest touch, and now she had as easily opened the door to the chamber of love—"unto every one that hath shall be given"—yes, the warmth of her reception was not entirely untinged with envy.

When the noisy greeting finally died away, she did not even bow. With a dreamy, far-away smile upon her lips she stood gazing at the score before her. A look of perplexity came across her face as she tried to read the notes, which had formerly been as simple and lucid as the spoken word. They meant nothing to her now. She put her face up close to the music and tried to force herself to read it; but in vain. Some tiny convolution of the brain had flattened or softened or hardened, and the work of years had been swept away like a dam of sand before a mountain torrent.

And thus it was that she stood before them, and thus it was that their enthusiasm changed first to wonder and then to impatience. They were willing to forgive a few vagaries upon the part of a

favorite, but they were not willing to be ignored in this frank and preoccupied manner. The orchestra played the prelude, waited a moment, and played it again; but there was no response from the girl. At last she raised her violin, the bow swept across it, bringing forth a low, clear note, but not the one she should have played. The orchestra stopped, while Nachette calmly tuned her violin in blissful independence of the audience, which was becoming each moment more restless. Then, as though in her own parlor and playing only to a few close friends, she raised her hand to the leader and shook her head, while a capricious smile wreathed her lips.

As she began to play there was a slightly perplexed expression upon her face, but soon her lids drooped over her eyes in the old, familiar pose, and the audience gave a sigh of satisfaction and settled back in anticipation. There did not seem to be much thread to her melody, but each note was given with the haunting sweetness of a touch which would not surrender its marvelous perfection at the mere breaking of a tiny gray knot tied in the filmy softness of the brain. Gradually, as she played, her melody gathered method and purpose. Her lids drooped still lower until the long lashes, sweeping the rounded cheeks, suggested the sleep of infancy, which the tender playing also seemed to indicate. Gently the music floated forth, breathing the essence of mother-love from the cradle-songs of many lands, until with a sudden grating discord it stopped, and the girl stood upon the stage with hand pressed to heart and eyes staring as though she saw a horrible vision.

The entire audience gave a start. Back near the

entrance a blind man, who had been listening with an expression almost of pain upon his face, gave a sharp cry and fell back as though he had been stricken. Nachette continued to gaze into space, but now there was purpose in her gaze. It was not vacant, instead it seemed to be fixed upon something floating in the air before her. The members of the audience sat erect in electrified eagerness to see what the next move would be. Her lips were moving, and those nearest the stage caught the words, "I could not play it that night, but I can play all I see in your soul now—heart of my heart."

Again she raised the violin. For a moment her eyes continued to rest upon the unseen floating object, and then she placed the instrument to her cheek, and without altering her gaze she began a passionate love-melody. As she played the tears slowly welled up in her eyes, overflowed, and crept unheeded down her soft cheek. Never was played such passionate music, so tender, so vibrant with love, and yet so heart-piercingly sad. She took a step forward; her lips were slightly parted, while the violin sobbed and pleaded for the return of her lover. Her whole frame trembled, and as her head, thrown back and quivering, loosened the luxuriant hair, permitting it to fall in raven ripples about her shoulders, the expression on her face was almost mortal in its sorrow. At last her limbs seemed to give way beneath her, and she sank to her knees upon the stage; but still the wild, yearning music swept on, and still the upraised face seemed to plead.

At this moment a tall, slender man was seen slowly walking down the aisle. His steps were placed

with a peculiar movement which did not seem to impede their speed, but each one seemed to test its resting-point for a fleeting moment before trusting his weight upon it. He had nearly reached the stage before he was noticed. An usher, seeing that his dress was poor, and also noting the peculiar gait, hurried to intercept him. As he felt a hand placed upon his shoulder the old man turned, and they saw that he was blind. The usher spoke to him in a low tone, but the old man shook off his arm, and in a voice which carried to the back of the large hall said:

"No, no; I must speak to her; I must learn who she is. Never was such music as this played on the earth before. I have heard it in my dreams, and now I have heard it when awake, and I must speak to her."

There was the excitement of insanity in the old man's voice, which his words only served to intensify, and a special officer who had also come down the aisle laid his hand upon him; but the old man took a ring from his pocket and said in a confident voice: "I have a message for her; give her this ring and ask if she will speak to me."

All this time Nachette had been playing her sorrowful love-song. Just as she seemed at the point of fainting a stern-faced woman stepped upon the stage and lifted her in her arms. It was at this juncture that the old man had taken the ring from his pocket. Clarice raised her eyes just as the man's face was turned toward the stage. She was holding the form of the fainting girl to her breast, but she was not looking at her face; instead, her eyes, white-rimmed and staring with wonder, were riveted on the face of the blind man. Twice she

essayed to speak, but the words died in her dry throat, and then with a supreme effort she leaned across the footlights, still holding the half unconscious girl, and whispered hoarsely: "John Braxton, is that really you?"

At the words Nachette revived and looked eagerly at the little group in the aisle, but when she saw who composed it she turned her face away and stood in dejected silence.

But the effect of the words upon the blind man was startling. He seemed to have received an electric shock; he threw up his hands with an inarticulate cry, and then fairly screamed: "That voice—that voice! Who is it speaks the name which has long been dead? Oh, I cannot see, I cannot see! I am blind, I am blind! Tell me what it is that is taunting me. Tell me!"

There was no doubt of his insanity by this time, and the special officer started to hustle him from the hall, but was stopped by an imperious voice from the stage: "Do not take him away, bring him to Nachette's dressing-room at once."

There was that in the voice of Clarice which commanded respect, and the blind man was immediately conducted to Nachette's dressing-room. Clarice turned, put her arm about the swaying form of her young charge, and as the curtain slowly fell she led her off the stage amidst profound silence.

Throughout the vast building the hush was so oppressive that the delicate machinery which lowered the curtain sounded harsh and raucous like the lowering of a coffin into its grave.

Part of the audience was standing, part was leaning forward in expectancy. They were in a daze; they knew not whether it was a bit of real

life which was surging about them, or only a novel innovation in the way of stage-tricks.

Someone in the gallery started a faint and questioning applause. It was caught up here and there, and then, as if they had been waiting to catch their cue, the entire audience joined, and it was with a relief to the tightened chords of the heart that the volume swelled and rolled in a mighty wave which shook the building.

As the applause continued, flowers and wedding-gifts were sent up to the stage, and slowly the audience settled back to delightful approval of this new sensation which had been created for their amusement. After a time Nachette, leaning on the arm of the master of ceremonies, stepped before the curtain and made a series of bows while he asked them to excuse her as she was greatly overwrought.

Somewhat reluctantly the audience finally accepted her excuses, and secretly feeling that they had been a little slighted, they started out through the various aisles, each in his own way discussing the dramatic ending of the concert. Criticism is not invariably a true interpretation of the criticised, but when absolutely frank it gives an unobstructed view of the soul—of the critic.

"A clever bit of acting," said a bald-headed man with mustaches curled at the ends.

"I think the one who made up as the blind man was the most realistic," replied his companion. She was not exactly his wife; she knew that he had a wife, but she did not know the terms he was on with her own very best friend—or several other women.

"It is remarkable how these stage-folk learn to

cover their real natures," continued the man, who did not even know that his companion had been married three times.

"Isn't it? I don't see how their best friends can tell what is real and what is only acting."

"It is an astonishing thing to me," remarked a supercilious young man whose family name and fortune had become a household word through the persistent advertising of a delectable table-whisky, "it is an astonishing thing to me to see to what lengths these stage people will go to attract attention."

"Do you believe it was all put on?" asked his companion, who still clung to some of her girlish dreams. She was quite young and had found it impossible to throw all her ideals overboard, although she perfectly well understood the folly of sentiment and did not intend to allow it to interfere with her career.

"Why, my deah child," answered her escort indulgently—she was a very pretty girl—"this was merely a stage trick, and no doubt it will be worth thousands of dollars to her in advertising. These people never do anything without figuring its worth in publicity."

"Well, if it was all acting she has as much histrionic as musical ability. I must admit that while she was playing to that unseen lover it made me feel more creepy than Lady Macbeth ever did. I couldn't quite see into the blind man's part."

The young man smiled at her girlish simplicity, and replied: "Just look at the papers to-morrow and you will find it all worked out as an allegory." There was just a tinge of disappointment in her smile as she got into the waiting limousine.

"Poor little thing!" said a woman whose dress, while absolutely neat and becoming, showed that she had other cares besides the choosing of new gowns. "She must have suffered terribly. Did you see how sad her eyes were, John?"

"The cause may not be as bad as it appears, little woman. You see if actors and musicians did not feel all the emotions much more strongly than other folk, they could not be artists themselves."

"Yes, but the pain is real while it is there, and she showed that she was suffering terribly."

"Well, when the pendulum swings back she will revel in joy just as much above its cause as this sorrow was below it. Poor things, big emotions are big responsibilities!"

"Well, I'm glad that you and I are just common, everyday home-bodies, aren't you?" said the little woman, leaning a trifle more heavily on her husband's arm, and getting an answering pressure. "I wonder if the little ones got to sleep without trouble?"

"Of course they did—if that nonsensical sister of yours has allowed them to go to sleep at all. They seem to think her coming does away with all law, and two hours of her guardianship means two weeks lost in the way of discipline."

"But how they all do love her!" said the little woman with a happy smile. "And anyway, half the time you are as bad as she is."

"Ah, well, discipline is necessary; but even if we do let up on it for a while, they'll get their fill once they begin to fight with the hard old world. Let you and I stay away for another half-hour and get a nice little supper."

CHAPTER XL

WHEN Nachette reached her dressing-room she sank into a chair; but Clarice stood with form rigid and face pale, and eyes fixed on the door. Soon it opened, and the special officer entered with the blind man.

"You may leave us," said Clarice, and the officer withdrew.

"Who is this?" asked the man, as he stood with arms outstretched, seeming to strain for the sight he had lost so long ago.

"It is Clarice," she answered.

"Can it be—can it really be?" he asked in a trembling voice. "And the one who played upon the viclin—is it—can it be——"

"It is our child."

"Ah, God, now I am ready to die! But have you no tenderness for me? I searched all through the South for you, and then I came to this great, heartless city because I was told in Kentucky that some one answering your description had come here; but I was blind, and my money was soon spent, and since then I have been a beggar."

The old love was beating at the heart of Clarice, but she fought it down, and her voice was hard. "Why did you throw away your fortune? Why did you pretend to be dead? Why did you leave everything to one wife and child and desert the

other? For in the eyes of God I was as much your wife as was the other woman."

Nachette was looking at the man in shrinking horror. This was the man whose double life had brought her into what had seemed a paradise only to turn it into a hell.

"Clarice, I was coming back on that boat to make you my wife, before the eyes of man as well as of God; but you know what happened. I could not find you—I tried as soon as I could, but for a long time I was delirious. Look at my hands—my face."

She looked at the scarred hands and face, which told of the fearful burns they had suffered.

"My eyes were destroyed by the gas and steam, and in falling I seized a piece of red-hot iron; in some way it did not heal and—you can see what it left me."

"But still you permitted me to think that you were dead. Why did you let them bury another man under your name?"

"They did not; I never was John Braxton."

Had a bomb exploded in the room it could not have produced a greater effect. Both women started forward. "Then you are not Jack's father?" exclaimed Nachette.

"This is false—you are John Braxton," cried Clarice.

"I shall tell you. I was a man of genius, but I was also the victim of drugs. I was married to a woman cold and proper and unsympathetic; she never helped me, but only added to my other temptations. I had but one friend in the world, and this was John Braxton. He——"

"Oh, speak quickly! You are driving me insane!" interrupted Clarice.

"I shall tell you everything. I was a total wreck when he took me in hand, but he fought for me and with me. I lived alone most of my time, and wrote. He was a man of talent but had little creative ability; he would revise and criticise my work, and at my request he would allow it to appear over his name. My wife had independent means; she would not get a divorce from me and I had no grounds upon which to seek one from her. She was a good woman, but she made me fiendish. I wanted her to think that I was dead, and so I hid myself from the world. I met you by accident—you know the result. It was my vanity which led me to give you the name of John Braxton because it was so well known—and I myself had made it, or at least had done much to make it famous. After meeting you I found it easier to fight my vile appetites. I grew to love you and our child, and I was becoming a man. At last I became free. My wife died, and I was coming back to marry you. John Braxton came with me, for I had told him all—and he was the only one who did know. He was coming down to see me married—and you know how we arrived. When I regained my right mind I found that he was buried. I myself was a creature almost without a past. Think—think of the position I was in! I had not a friend on whom to rely—not one who really knew me. My writings and compositions had brought me in a good income, but it was all in his name. I was what you see before you—a broken, useless, unknown, unloved—beggar." He paused for a moment, and then continued in a trembling voice: "And now—can you not forgive me?"

For a moment there was no answer except the

broken sobs of Nachette, and then the voice of Clarice in a heavy whisper, vibrant with fear and dread: "And did John Braxton have a son?"

"Yes, he was——"

A scream, horrid as a wail from the pit, burst from her lips as Clarice reeled and clutched at a chair. "Then I am a murderer!" she wailed, "for it was I who sent that poor boy to his doom. O God—God! What shall I do?"

"I am blind," pleaded the man as he groped about the room, his face distorted with dread. "Ah, pity me and tell me what is the matter. I am blind, I am blind!"

"Can you not see?" shrieked Clarice. Nachette was staring at her, and in her eyes was an expression close to hate itself. "He married our daughter in secret. I thought they both had the same father, and I sent him forth to—to take his own life."

"When?" asked the man eagerly.

"This very day—this black, black day!"

"Then I was right—it may not be too late. When one starts forth on *his* journey he does not hurry."

"What do you mean?" The woman seized him by the lapels of his coat and seemed on the point of strangling him, so fierce was her grasp.

"I met him this night on the Battery—I recognized the voice. He sent me to you. Come, we must go at once."

"No, you cannot come, you would impede us; we must make all haste." Utterly numb to her cruelty, Clarice threw open the door. There was a little group of men near, and they appeared very conscious, but she did not notice them. "See that my carriage is ready," she called to an attendant.

When she re-entered the room the man was standing in sorrowful dignity. "I think that I can be of help," he suggested; "I know every foot of that region."

"You may come," said Nachette, and Clarice acquiesced.

"Drive to the Battery on a dead run," said Clarice to the driver.

"No, to the Fifty-ninth Street entrance of the subway," said the blind man, and there was a new ring to his voice.

The trip was like a nightmare. Clarice was hardly able to sit still during the stops. At the Grand Central they took the express and were shot through the underground tube like a projectile, but still the slowness of her journey seemed to stifle her. Reaching the Battery, the blind man took the lead again, and the two women were glad to follow him. Nachette was deathly pale, but she had perfect control of herself. Several times during the trip Clarice had glanced at her with a sinking pain in her heart. She knew that a disappointment now would be the end of it all, and she was forced to admit that it would be a far more merciful end than to eke out a miserable existence.

The moon was getting low, but it still illuminated the park, although somewhat dimly. The blind man paused. "He was sitting on the bench at the end of this path. I shall wait here. If you wish to see me again, you may; if not—God bless you both. Good-by."

Without a word the women left him and hurried on. There on the bench which the blind man had indicated was an erect form, but it did not look up as they neared it, and Nachette seized the arm of

Clarice for support. Clarice was also trembling, and they both paused. The head of the man was bent forward. They stooped and saw that it was Jack. His eyes were open—but they were fixed and glassy. The two women screamed and clutched each other.

At the scream the man on the bench started to his feet. He saw the two women, and his pale face became flushed in his defense. "I had not faltered," he apologized to Clarice. "I left it to the moon, and the shadow had still an inch to go. See—I was watching it, I should have——"

"Hush!" said Clarice, as she put the limp form of Nachette into his arms, "there is no need now. You and Nachette are not related. Don't you understand? I made a great mistake, and now you can live and be her husband."

Again and again he pressed the girlish form to his bosom and showered kisses upon the quivering lips until at last she opened her eyes. "Ah, sweetheart," he murmured, "now I know how foolish it is to say that joy can ever kill—for never until now was I fully alive."

"Oh, Jack, now I have a father all my own, and all this time I might have had a name of my own too, and then I should not have felt so ashamed."

"And what is your real name, foolish one?" he answered, laughing lightly at the childlike triumph in her voice. "What name can there be which is half wonderful enough for my wonderful wife?"

And then she drew away from him. "Jack, my father is blind and maimed and poorly clad, but I——"

"Well, that is too bad, but do not look as though you expected it was going to scare me away en-

tirely. I think we can fix it so that he won't be poorly clad at least. What is his name?"

"I don't know—I never thought to ask." She turned to Clarice with a new confusion mantling her brow. "What is my father's name—mother?"

"My child—my little girl!" At the word "mother" all the pent-up emotions of a lifetime gushed forth as the woman clasped her child in her arms. She knew that it would take a long time for readjustment, and she was willing to be patient; but at the homely old word, grander than any other title beneath the sun, all her reserve melted away and but one idea seemed of importance—this was her own child, and now there would be no further need to conceal it.

"Why, dearie, I——" she also paused in embarrassment, and then turned to Jack. "It is a tangled web, and you will soon know it all; but he said that you had sent him, and he had your ring."

"Can this be possible? Could such a slender thread as this have brought us together again? Where is he now?"

"Come, let us hurry to him," cried Nachette. "He will be lonely. I don't want to think that there is a single creature on the face of the whole earth who is not perfectly happy."

They found him where they had left him. He was standing straight and still like a sentry, and he made no move until Nachette, at first with a little shy reluctance, put her arms about him. "Father, I don't quite know how to treat a father, but oh, how I have longed for one all my life! What—what is your name? I want a full name that is all my own. What is my name?"

He pressed his lips to her brow. "And are you

really the little toddling baby that I lost so long ago? Ah, child, but your playing is marvelous! I have never been——"

"Wait, wait," interrupted the girl, drawing back and holding up a finger for silence. For a full minute she stood thus, and then gave a glad little cry. "I can read it again—I can read it again! I can see every note which was on the score. And now tell me your name and my cup of joy will be filled."

"My name is Arnold Beauchamp. I come of good family, but I made a terrible wreck of my life. Still, child, weak and broken as I am, I can at least say that the Lord has saved me with fire. I have not had a single bad habit since that fatal night when the steamer burned; and my life has been clean, but very, very hard. I don't want you to think——"

"Now don't talk this way. You act as though there might be a doubt as to your welcome. Why, your coming has changed the entire universe for us. I now know what it is to be born again. Ah, the world, how beautiful it is! Look up at the stars—and the lights upon the waters—and the sounds! Listen to all the countless voices, every voice with its own melodious tone and all singing songs of gladness. Oh, life—how beautiful, how beautiful!"

She stood facing the waters and looking up into the sky studded with stars and still bright with the moon, which was just sinking from sight. Jack stood near her looking at her with eyes glistening with the moisture of great gladness and shining with the light of a mighty love. Back of them stood the woman who had borne her cross up the hill until she had seen it turn into a golden crown

at the top. Her eyes were on the girl, but in her hand rested the hand of a man who had been plowed with sin and sorrow and sowed with disappointment, but who was still able to produce a harvest of love now that tender hands were there to gather it.

"Oh, the music, the music!" murmured the girl. "I too must offer up my humble song."

Half mechanically she took her violin from its case, and tuning it while still seeming to listen to other music, she began to play. Soft and tender, but rich and sweet, the beautiful sounds floated up and mingled with the grand chorus which coarser ears than hers could not catch. Wonderful above all her other playing was this thank-offering of Nachette's; but the music is not for us, so we shall leave her there with her joyous face upturned to the stars, which smile back at her.